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Hill Politics in Northeast India

THIRD EDITION

S. K. Chaube

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Third Edition

S. K. Chaube

Orient BlackSwan

Hill Politics in Northeast India

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To

My Mother

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Preface to This Edition

All works of current history are unsatisfactory. Besides being too close to the narrated events, it needs continuous updating. This volume was originally written to trace the historical background of the reorganisation of northeast India and gauge its immediate impact. A dozen years later a follow-up was published that took a slightly different trajectory, called *Electoral Politics in North-East India*, by the Universities Press. The second edition of *Hill Politics*, in 1999, went through some revision. By that time the structure of northeast Indian politics had basically stabilised, though new issues were springing up, particularly in the administrative and the policy spheres. One welcome development by today is the reduction of mutual suspicion thanks to greater interaction of northeast India and the rest of the country. Several politicians of northeast Indian hills, not to speak of the plains, have been playing key roles in the national affairs while several all-India parties are operating in northeast Indian hill states. Northeast India has supplied top bureaucrats and jurists to the nation. Many of the sportspersons from the region represent India in international events. The Shillong Chamber Choir entertained President Barack Obama at the conclusion of his state visit to India in 2010. And, to cap it all, armed policemen and women of Nagaland were deployed in the national capital during the Commonwealth Games of 2010 for the maintenance of law and order.

As in the earlier editions, I have excluded Sikkim from my narrative as its links with northeast India is purely administrative.

A new postscript has been added to this volume. In addition, the tables and figures have also been updated.

Preface to the Second Edition

When this book was published twenty-six years ago the primary aim was to present, in general, the social and political history of northeast India and, in particular, of the hill areas – up to the time of the reorganisation of the region. Northeast India still remains mainly a conglomerate of seven political units. However, the sociopolitical dynamics of the region have thrown up some new elements.

When the book was published, some observers noted that it had regarded secessionist violence in northeast India as transient. Indeed, it did not share the alarmist concern of the period about the fate of the region. It was, rather, based on the belief that democracy itself is a great unifier as it instils confidence among marginal social groups and cements national unity. On the other hand, the book was by no means a part of the neo-radical celebration of ethnic autonomy. For, in my view, both nationalism and ethnic particularism are ascriptive, arbitrary and *ad hoc*.

The book's focus was on the contradiction/competition between the traditional chiefs making use of the tribals' love for pristine freedom to preserve their vested interests against the republican wave in India, and a new elite – the Christianised literati – claiming the leadership of a democratically constituted society that would at the same time retain its autonomy.

The situation today has grown complex; the traditional chiefs have been largely sidelined and partly accommodated in the new structure of power. Statehood, the creation of job opportunities and some developmental activity have only partly satisfied the aspirations of the hill people, particularly of the rapidly increasing numbers of educated youth. Frustration has pushed a section of them to the politics of violence, not necessarily secessionist. Violence has become endemic to northeast Indian politics.

My framework, incidentally, rejects the description of the theme of this volume as 'tribal political'. It also avoids

a mechanical quest for production relations for, except in the Bhoi area of the Khasi hills (Meghalaya), no production relation has actually been established though aggrandisement of private property at the cost of the community and the state is rampant.

In this edition I have added a postscript which is an assessment of the situation in the 1990s. I have replaced the tables in the appendix with updated ones and incorporated minor corrections in the text. The text including old names and spellings of the original edition has been retained here.

Preface to the First Edition

This volume is the product of a labour of love that developed during nearly 10 years of the author's working life in northeast India. The burden of his commitment became all the more heavy because of the feeling that there is a sad lack of understanding, in the rest of the country, of the political turmoil in northeast India. The primary purpose, therefore, was to present the maximum amount of 'facts' that one could gather about a problem region of India.

There is also an attempt to interpret the facts very tentatively. The problem has been set in the perspective of the theory of nation-building. Independent India inherited a territorial boundary that had been fixed by the exigencies of an alien imperialistic administrations and inevitably cut across many ethnic consolidations. The problem was intensified by a diffusionist modernising wave that had practically no relation with the prevailing mode of production and was bound to create a cultural crisis.

One of the demands of modernism is that for territorial loyalty which passes for 'nationalism' and seeks to substitute our primordial loyalties to clan, tribe,caste,race,community and even language. In its heightened form the contradiction results in so-called disloyality to the hitherto unfamiliar values of nation-state.

Modern territorial nationalism cannot be properly understood out of context. In Europe it was the product of industrial revolution that demolished the ethnic barriers of peoples within the jurisdictions of soverign States. The problem of the developing countries like India is that they inherited the State system from their colonial rulers without the benefit of industrialization. In the most backward areas of such countries the problem becomes all the more acute. And in the case of India, as many of those backward areas lie in the border regions, they are susceptible to the changing waves of international relations. The resulting

instability is almost bound to generate exaggerated suspicions about such ethnic minorities.

It is, however, frequently forgotten that ethnic minorities are as much subject to social laws as the majority in a state. Aspirations of ethnic groups are generally determined by the aspirations of the dominant section within such community. But, as the hegemony of any section is unlikely to go unchallenged, aggregation of social goals for any community is a difficult task. It is, at the same time, more than possible that the dominant section of any minority or backward community will set its view on a position favourably comparable to that of the stronger neighbours. The strategy ranges from conciliatory techniques (like subordinate alliance, clientilism and differential migration) to alienation (like secession and civil war). The demand for 'autonomy' offers a fairly elastic middle-order choice that suits the needs of an emerging middle-class in as much as the demand does not militate against national authority but accords them a convenient bargaining position. The elasticity of the concept, however, permits a great deal of misunderstanding. The present volume, it is hoped, will help removing some of these misunderstandings in relation to a sensitive trouble-torn region of India.

The argument of this volume is that the 'tribal' situation in northeast India cannot be properly understood except by viewing it in its historical perspective. Although the British policy with regard to the hill people was one of least interference, the impact of administration and its corollary, the church,significantly corroded their internal system of authority and exposed them to territorial power. A modernistic middle class was its offshoot. The tradition-modernism antithesis was of course rooted in deeper conflicts of interest and, whereas the traditional leaders adopted the romantic reactionary slogan of primordial freedom of the tribes, the new elite clashed with them headlong. This contradiction was synthesised in the demands for 'regional' autonomy within the framework of a nation-state. The constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule, evolved in 1950, proved inadequate for the accommodation of such aspirations.

Although the method of this study is basically political, author has made use of history, geography and sociology. Great debt is acknowledged to the numerous ethnographical publications

on the peoples of the area since the end of the last century. He has drawn mainly from published materials and official records. But those scattered pieces could not be tied up except through hundreds of interviews with the living personalities who have shaped the political movements in the hills. The views expressed are, needless to say, author's own.

Lastly, author personally considers the use of the terms like 'tribe', 'Christian', 'Hindu' unfortunate but unavoidable in a work like this. Utmost care has, therefore, been taken to restrict the use of such terms to the denotation of particular cultural conditions. In no way are they associated with ethnic categories.

Acknowledgement is due to virtually innumerable people who have helped author to weave together the pieces of literary material, available at official and personal archives, by submitting themselves to searching interviews. It is only hoped that this volume will not hurt them in any way. Responsibility for all observations is author's. The book was seen through the press after the author joined Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and a helping hand in reading the proof was lent by author's colleague, Dr Partha Chatterjee.

Introduction

Three valleys, surrounded by and interspersed with a number of mountain ranges, constitute the sensitive region known as northeastern India, which could be more appropriately described as eastern India. The 'blue hills'[1] comprising the eastern Himalayas on the north, the Naga hills on the east, the Mizo and Tripura hills on the south and the Shillong plateau (named in the 1930s by the Indian geographer, S. P. Chatterji, as Meghalaya) on the west, form almost completely natural boundaries of the Brahmaputra valley, the heartland of Assam. The district of Cachar lying beyond the Shillong plateau is geographically, historically and ethnically an extension of Gangetic Bengal, washed by the Barak river, and is separated from the Brahmaputra valley by the Shillong plateau. Between the Naga hills and the Chin hills (of Burma) is situated the Imphal valley (the Manipur plains) with an altitude of about 3000 feet.

For several centuries the valleys and hills of northeast India have been exposed to waves of invasion and migration. 'The province of Assam at the far northeastern corner of India is a museum of nationalities', wrote J. B. Fuller in 1909.[2] Of these, the Garo living in the western part of the Meghalaya plateau have a legend of having migrated from the northwest, that is, the southern side of central Tibet.[3] The Khasi, at least some of them, claim to have migrated from southeast Asia, part of their route probably passing through Burma.[4] The Kuki and the Chin inhabiting the southern hills of Manipur, Tripura, and most of the Mizo hills are supposed to be from southern China.[5] They are also believed to have contributed to the basic linguistic strain of the Meithei who inhabit the Manipur valley.[6] The Naga, settled in Nagaland and the northern hills of Manipur, and some of the groups in the northeast frontier are mostly assumed to be immigrants from eastern Tibet, whereas most of the inhabitants

of the sub-Himalayan and *cis*-Himalayan areas trace their origin directly from southern Tibet.[7]

This is only a very generalised picture. For none of these ethnic groups, due to their long journeys of migration, can claim racial purity. Speculations about their migrations have been widely made and widely contradicted.[8] The salient obstacles posed by stray cultural similarities spotted at random between apparently unrelated groups such as the Garo and the Ao Naga,[9] the Sema and the Kuki,[10] amid hosts of differences of great magnitude, come in the way of drawing a clear picture. There is still a lack of adequacy in the explanation of the different levels of culture and social systems. The matriliny prevalent among the Garo, the Khasi and the Lalung-Tiwa living on the eastern slopes of the Khasi hills and certain small groups like the Purum scattered in Manipur, and the wavy hair of some Angamis are yet puzzles for social and physical anthropologists. The predominantly Austric language of the Khasi has inspired several speculations among philologists.

The religious composition is no less complex. Brahminism reached the valley of Manipur probably in the fifteenth century to which some Manipur Brahmins trace their settlement.[11] A temple of Vishnu at Bishenpur (Vishnupur) on an ancient route between the Manipur and Barak valleys is claimed to be as old as that. Vaishnavism reached the Nocte Nagas of Tirap (the southern district of Arunachal) by the eighteenth century through the efforts of the followers of Sankara Deva of Assam. It even touched the fringe of the Khasi and the Garo hills. The Chakma of the Chittagong hills, a section of whom are now living in the Lushai hills, profess Buddhism. Several sections of the people of northwestern and northern Arunachal belong to the same school of Buddhism as prevails in Tibet. Since the nineteenth century Christianity started spreading fast in the Garo, Khasi, Mizo (Lushai) and Naga hills and is now the religion of about half the total population. Indigenous faiths persist among the rest.

Advent of British Power

This tessellated pavement was brought under British rule, according to the official British view, because of 'pressing

political necessity'.[12] As early as 1869, Alexander Mackenzie outlined what seemed to be the 'manifest destiny' of the British in northeast India. 'Fate seems determined to prove that there shall be no rest for the English in India till they stand forth as the Governors or advisers of each tribe and people in the land.'[13]

Fate had smiled on the East India Company at Plassey. In 1760 the Company annexed the Chittagong Hill Tract from the Nawab of Bengal. In 1761 the combined armed forces of the Company and the Nawab assaulted Tripura. Most of the plains territories of the Tripura king were registered as his *zamindari* (estate) while the hills and a patch of plainsland were left in the occupation of the king as Independent Tipperah or 'Hill Tipperah'. In 1762 Captain Verelst led three companies of sepoys (armed Indian constables) towards Manipur to fight the Burmese and established contact with the Chinese traders there,[14] but had to return from Cachar after a year. In 1765 the Company acquired the *dewani* (revenue collecting authority) of Bengal and its power reached the borders of Sikkim, Bhutan, Cooch Behar, Assam and Arrakan, besides the Garo and Khasi hills.[15]

'When Hastings began his administration of Bengal, in April 1772, the opening of some sort of commercial and diplomatic relations with Tibet had already become an object of Company policy.'[16] The Bhutanese raid on Cooch Behar in that year necessitated British assistance to Cooch Behar. The aggression was repelled and a pacification raid planned on Bhutan when the Tashi (Panchen) Lama, then regent of Tibet, intervened on the side of Bhutan. George Bogle was sent to Bhutan in 1774 with instructions 'to open a mutual and equal communication of trade between the inhabitants of Bhutan and Bengal.'[17] He went as far as Shigatse in Tibet, and established a close friendship with the Tashi Lama 'away from the centre of Chinese influence in Lhasa', but the mission bore no immediate fruit. In 1780 the Tashi Lama died in Peking, and in 1781 Bogle died in Calcutta. In 1783 Captain Turner was sent to Bhutan. Through a series of treaties signed in 1780, 1784 and 1787, the districts of Falakata–Ambari and Jalpesh were transferred to Bhutan. In 1792 Bhutan's claim over Bijni was conceded, but occasional conflicts continued over the question of the tributes Bhutan was liable to pay for the conceded territories.

The Bhutan episode furnished the Company with the information about Assam trade, which the board of directors had been looking for. The Company was interested in further knowledge about the trade and in 1774 appointed Hugh Baillie as the Company's agent at Goalpara, where he had been an agent of Clive's Society of Trade. Britain's territorial interest too was directed towards the east, along with the commercial. In 1774 Captain Henniker made a punitive raid on the plains territories of the Jaintia kingdom bordering Sylhet, and though the causes were not clear even to Captain R. B. Pemberton,[18] realised fines from the raja. In 1789 the Company intervened in the southern side of the Garo foothills against the oppressive control of the *chaudhuries* (landlords) of Mymensingh. The first Garo chief to enter into a 'treaty' with the Company and to be recognised as a *zamindar* of his area was Renghta.[19]

The minutes of Cornwallis (3 October 1792) show that the Company's first intervention in Assam was in 1792, at the request of the king of Assam and 'for the commercial advantages that Bengal may obtain' by a friendly and open intercourse with that country.[20] Captain Welsh, the commander of the expedition, made a detailed report on the prospects of trade in Assam and hoped that 'a communication with the neighbouring nations might be rendered beneficial to commerce, with proper encouragement'.[21] Although Welsh was not in favour of British withdrawal,[22] in view of domestic opposition, the Company recalled him in 1794. This 'special' relationship with Assam, till 1826 at any rate, was quite congenial to their flourishing trade.

Annexations

Meanwhile, in December 1812 David Scott, the 'energetic' frontierman of the Company, was appointed judge and joint-magistrate of Rangpur, the northeastern district of Bengal. In 1813, the East India Company lost its monopoly over Indian trade. A greater trading contact with China, provided by the Sea of Canton, became an imperative necessity. The search for additional trade in Assam was a part of this need. The Gurkha war of 1814–16 opened western Tibet through the acquisition of new territories to the west of Nepal, and the emphasis on

Bhutan for a route to Tibet was weakened for a while. But the eastward expansion continued. In September 1816, Scott was appointed as the Governor-General's Agent to the North East Frontier in addition to his post as joint magistrate of Rangpur and commissioner of Cooch Behar, with the duty of exercising 'a general control and superintendence over political relations and intercourse with the petty states in that quarter' including Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet, Cooch Behar, Bijni, Assam, Cachar, Manipur and Jaintia.[23]

While Scott was engaged in bringing the cotton producing Garo[24] under British authority, a great opportunity opened up in Assam and Manipur with the beginning of internecine conflicts in the royal families of Assam and Manipur, Burmese intervention in these conflicts, and the worsening of Anglo-Burmese relations. The military defeat of Burma and the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 led to the renunciation of Burma's claims on the territories of Assam, Manipur and their neighbourhood as well as the cession of Tenasserim and Arrakan to the British. According to the official British interpretation, the Assam hills west of the Patkoi range of mountains came under British possession by virtue of the treaty.[25] In 1852 lower Burma was annexed.[26] In 1862 the ceded territories of Burma were constituted into a chief commissioner's province. On 1 January 1886, upper Burma was annexed to it.

In 1826 David Scott was appointed as senior commissioner of Assam in addition to his existing role. A junior commissioner was posted for upper Assam. Scott's advice for restoration of upper Assam to a subordinate monarchy, with a view to pacifying the Assamese gentry, was accepted by the Supreme Government after a series of revolts had taken place and the position of the East India Company had become shaky in England. In 1833 Prince Purandar Singh was installed but was replaced in 1838 on a vague charge of 'mal-administration'. In 1842 Sadiya and the Muttock territory (Dibrugarh) also were annexed, extending direct British rule over the entire Brahmaputra valley. The Cachar plain was annexed in 1832 and its northern hills in two instalments, in 1839 and 1854. Manipur, however, was not annexed; it was given the charge of controlling the western Nagas.

In the wake of the Burmese attack, the British extended 'protection' to the Jaintia king and secured, from the *siem* (chief)

of Nongkhlow, Tirot Singh, permission for the construction of a sanatorium and a road from Sylhet to Kamrup through his territory. But later Tirot Singh grew suspicious of the British intention. He was joined in his resistance to the penetration by some other Khasi chiefs in 1829, but was crushed in 1833, two years after Scott's death. The Khasi chiefs had to enter into subordinate alliances with the British government and in all surrendered 31 villages to the British. In 1835 the Jaintia king was removed and his territory merged with British India. The Khasi chiefships were reduced to 25 in number under four kinds of chiefs: *siem, wahadadar, sirdar* and *lyngdoh*.[27]

In 1837 Pemberton was sent to Bhutan 'to settle terms for commercial intercourse between British India and Bhootan and, if possible, to effect an adjustment of the tributes payable for the *dwars*', that is, the passes being used for trade with Bhutan.[28] The mission achieved little success. In 1841 the Assam duars were attached against an annual payment of Rs 10,000 to Bhutan. In 1863 the Bengal duars were also attached against a total payment of Rs 25,000 per annum. In November 1864, a full-scale military assault was made against Bhutan, forcing its king to sign the Treaty of Sinchula.[29]

Lure of the Hills

Once the organised states in the region were brought under British control, the subordination of the turbulent hill people was a matter of time. Cotton, minerals, wild rubber and wild tea held out prospects for profit from the hills. Shortly after 1826, exploration for coal started in Assam. Though petroleum was discovered, it was not until 1865 that experimental drilling was initiated. (Shortly after that, Assam became a chief commissioner's province). Tea received the most immediate attention. By 1830 uncertainty appeared in the East India Company's trade with China, the supplier of tea. Though, as early as 1778 the discovery of indigenous tea was reported from the Singpho area, and during the Anglo-Burmese war a Scottish soldier, Robert Bruce, learnt its preparation from a Singpho chief, tea plantation was planned only after the annexation of upper Assam in 1838. Meanwhile, a bid to import tea seeds

from China was unsuccessful but a few Chinese plantation workers who reached Assam were employed under Charles Bruce, brother of Robert Bruce, to develop tea plants. In 1838 Assam tea was opened for private competition and Bruce was sacked.[30] The spread of the tea gardens from the middle of the nineteenth century strengthened the case for a 'forward policy' on the hills.

In the eastern foothills below the Patkoi, as early as 1825, Captain Neufville had met the mutually hostile Khampti (Hkampti), Singpho (Jingphaw), Miri, Muttock and the 'peaceably inclined' eastern Naga.[31] But the area was not completely subordinated until 1843 when the last batch of rebel Khamptis surrendered. To the west of the region, south of the plains of Nowgong, lived the Mikir, in virtual serfdom to the Assamese aristocracy, and behind them the turbulent Rengma (Naga). The former surrendered in 1838, the latter ten years later. In 1839 a 'forward policy' was initiated in the entire central and western Naga belt. The carrot and the stick were alternately used until 1849, when a major flare-up in the Naga hills made the government fall back. But in 1853, a junior assistant commissioner was stationed at Asalu, in the north Cachar hills bordering the Angami country. As a foil to those intransigent Nagas, several Kukis were settled in north Cachar with arms and rent-free land,[32] thus making use of the traditional Kuki–Naga feud for political purposes. The entire Naga hills up to the Burma border however, were not brought under effective administration till the end of British rule in India.

It is necessary to note that until the British advent, the notion of territorial or political authority was unknown in the hills. Thus, the frontier between the sub-Himalayan and *cis*-Himalayan British territory and Tibet was fixed only with the drawing of the McMahon Line in 1914. To the south of the Surma valley, the Chin–Lushai hills, 'a tract of most intricate hill ranges and impenetrable cane-brakes' was *terra incognita* before 1839.[33] Pemberton reported that the Lushai country east of Tripura had once been under the control of the Tripura ruler.[34] But Mackenzie held that Tripura's authority over the Lushai had never been settled or absolute.[35] Probably, depending upon the feuds, the fluctuating strength and the mobility of the

hill people, the rulers of Tripura, Cachar, Manipur and Burma controlled parts of the region from time to time. Consequently, the British advance on the hills was from all these sides. In 1777, for the first time a friendly chief in the Chittagong Hill Tract sought British assistance against Kuki raids. Successive raids on the gardens, and punitive measures since 1869 led to the Lushai expeditions of 1871–72 and 1889 after which the hills were brought under rule.

Thus the hill areas of northeast India entered the age of politics.

Notes and References

1 Acknowledgment to Hem Barua, *The Red River and the Blue Hills*, Gauhati, 1956.

2 Fuller's 'Introduction' written for Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, London, 1909, p. xiii.

3 Playfair., op. cit., pp. 10–16.

4 H. Bareh., *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Shillong, 1967, p. 35; S. K. Chatterjee, *Kirata–Jana–Kriti*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 13; P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, London, 1907, pp. 11–12.

5 Anthony Gilchrist McCall., *Lushai Chrysalis*, London, 1949, p. 26; A. W. Davis, *Gazetteer of North Lushai Hills*, Shillong, 1894, pp. 4–7.

It is necessary to note that the northern hills of Manipur are inhabited by the Naga whereas the western and the southern hills are inhabited by the Kuki–Chin. Vide T. C. Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, London, 1911, p. 1.

6 G. A. Grierson, in his *Report on the Linguistic Survey of India* (Calcutta, 1904, vol. iii, part iii, pp. 6–8) insisted on a connection between the Kuki–Chin, the Meithei, the Bodo and the Naga languages, all belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family, but was inclined to regard Meithei in the broad category of Kuki–Chin languages.

7 Sachin Roy (*Aspects of Padam–Minyong Culture*, Shillong 1964, p. 259) finds two different cultural strains in the north-western and the rest of the territory formerly known as NEFA – respectively Tibetan and trans-Brahmaputran, that is, Naga.

8 J. H. Hutton has speculated a great deal about the routes of migration of the Naga and the Kuki–Chin. He approved of Grierson's hypothesis about the Naga's link with the second wave

of emigration 'from the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese races of North-Western China' but points out their 'strong cultural affinities' with the natives of Burma and the Philippines without properly linking the points, vide Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, London, 1921, pp. 6–8. The Kuki, according to Hutton, migrated almost in historic times down the valley of Chindwin from its source to the Bay of Bengal, 'continuously throwing off branches of their race westward', vide his 'Introduction' written for N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, London, 1932, p. xvi. E. R. Leach, who worked among the Kachin, described these migration theories as 'preposterous'.

9 Playfair, op. cit., p. 22.

10 Hutton in Parry's *The Lakhers*.

11 T. C. Hodson., *The Meitheis*, London, 1908, p. 95.

12 A. C. Banerjee., *The Eastern Frontier of British India, 1784–1826*, Calcutta, 1946, second edition, p. 12.

13 Alexander Mackenzie, *Memorandum on the North-East Frontier*, 1869, quoted in his *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hills Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 369.

14 Ibid., p. 35.

15 *Report on Indian Constitutional Reform*, London, 1918, p. 25.

16 Alistair Lamb., *Britain and Chinese Central Asia – Road to Lhasa, 1767–1905*, London, 1960, p. 8.

17 Quoted by Francis Younghusband, *India and Tibet*, London, 1910, p. 9.

18 Subsection 2 of section 2 of R. B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier*, Calcutta, 1835.

19 Mackenzie, op. cit. p. 247.

20 S. K. Bhuyan., *Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771 to 1826*, Gauhati, 1949, p. 301.

21 Quoted by Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 389.

22 Ibid., p. 393. Pemberton (p. 128) also stressed the prospect.

23 Bhuyan., op. cit., p. 458.

24 The importance attached to Garo cotton is stressed even in the *Administrative Report of Bengal, 1872–73*, quoted in Mackenzie, op. cit, p. 266.

25 C. U. Aitchison., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and the Neighbouring Countries*, Calcutta, third edition, 1892, vol. I, pp. 198 and 291.

26 As early as 1835, Burma's importance was recognised by the British when Captain R. B. Pemberton visited the eastern frontier of Bengal seeking:

In the first place, to give a general description of the great chain of mountains...

Secondly, to describe the nature of the passes and countries by which this mountain-chain has been penetrated...

Thirdly, to describe the countries extending east from the banks of the Ningthee river to the frontiers of China...

Fourthly, to endeavour to estimate the comparative value of the different passes from the British territories into Ava (Northern Burma) and to offer such suggestions as may appear likely to facilitate the rendering to them either lines of commercial intercourse or military operations. And,

Fifthly, to describe the countries of Cachar, Jynteeah and Cossyah hills which have been recently annexed to the British Indian dominion' (Preface to Pemberton's Report).

27 Mackenzie, op. cit., pp. 237–38.

28 Ibid., p. 11.

29 According to Article 2 of the Treaty of Sinchula, 'the whole tract known as the 18 Dooars bordering on the districts of Rungpur, Cooch Behar and Assam together with the hill country on the left bank of the Teesta up to such point as may be determined by the British Commissioner appointed for the purpose was transferred from Bhutan'. The adjustment of boundary with Bhutan was not completed until 1951, when independent India transferred some territories to Bhutan by the Assam (Alteration of Boundaries) Act of 1951. The transferred territory comprised 32.81 square miles 'lying to the South of Bhutan' within 26°45' and 27° North Latitude and 91°15' and 91°45' East Longitude.

30 J. M. Scott., *The Tea Story*, London, 1964.

31 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 88.

32 Ibid., p. 146.

33 Robert Reid., *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883–1941*, Shillong, 1942, p. 3, quoting D. R. Lyall, Commissioner, Chittagong Division.

34 A. S. Reid., *Chin–Lushai Land*, London, 1893, p. 1.

35 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 286.

CHAPTER I

A Specialised Government

In a way, the whole of Assam had a specialised administration till 31 March 1937. Since its annexation to Bengal, the territory was under a non-regulated system. After its constitution as a chief commissioner's province on 6 February 1874, it was declared a scheduled district. On 1 September 1905, it became part of the Lieutenant Governor's Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. On 1 April 1912, it was separated and converted to chief commissionership, this time with a legislature (under the Indian Councils Act of 1909). It became a Governor's province in 1921.

As regards the hill areas, the British chose to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors the Ahoms who, according to the Assamese historian, S. K. Bhuyan, had worked for 'conciliation, backed by a display of force when it could be effectively applied.'[1] They had come after the disintegration of the Ahom power and in the midst of chaos. One of their earliest tasks, according to the British official historian, Mackenzie, was to 'reconcile' the conflicting claims on land, money and services of *paiks* (serfs) between the people of the hills and of the plains.[2]

British administration in northeast India had been initiated from Rangpur where in 1816 David Scott established his authority on the Garo after classifying them into three groups: (1) Most of the Garos in the plains were under the effective administration of the landlords of Mymensing and Rangpur. (2) Garos in the foothills were tributary to the landlords but were virtually independent. (3) Independent Garos lived in the high hills. Scott advocated a uniformly specialised administration and a modified judicial system for the first category of Garos.[3] Accordingly, Regulation X of 1822 was promulgated. Operation of the existing regulations was suspended. The administration of justice, the collection of revenue, the superintendence of the police and all other branches were vested in the civil commissioner for the northeastern parts of Rangpur. The officer

would conduct it 'agreeably to the principles and spirit of the existing Regulations' subject to the restrictions of Regulation X of 1822, and other modifications made by the Governor-General, in the rules of administration of criminal and civil justice and revenue duties.[4]

Extension of authority over the Khasi and the Cachar hills led to the enactment of Act VI of 1835 by the Governor-General of India in Council, on 30 March 1835. Accordingly, the functionaries appointed to 'the political charge of the Cossiyah Hills, or the Superintendence of the Territory of Cachar' were placed under the control and superintendence, in civil cases, of the *Sudder Dwenny Adawlut* (civil court) and in criminal cases of the *Nizamut Adawlut* (criminal court). The officers in the territory of Cachar were placed, in revenue cases, under the control and superintendence of the *Sudder* board of revenue, which would be exercised in conformity with the instructions received from the government at Fort William in Bengal. The responsibility for the administration of the 'British' villages in the Khasi hills was vested in their local heads designated as sardars.

Following the report of A. J. Moffat-Mills (1853) the foundations of district administration were laid in Assam.[5] In 1854 a junior assistant commissioner was appointed as the adminis-trator of the British portion of the Khasi–Jaintia hills, simultaneously functioning as Political Agent to the Khasi states.[6] The Jaintia territories were divided into twelve *dolloiships*. The *dollois* heard all civil cases, at first without exception and after 1841 up to a certain limit, and all criminal complaints not of a heinous character in which only the people of their own villages were concerned. Their administration was corrupt. In 1860, a house tax was imposed, sparking off two successive rebellions up to March 1863.[7]

In 1862 Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, laid down that the hill people had to be 'made to understand and feel the power' of the government through 'a simple plan of government suitable to their present condition and circumstance, and interfering as little as possible with existing institutions' through the extension of intercourse with them and endeavour 'to introduce among them civilization and order'.[8] After November 1863 an English officer was stationed at Jowai (Jaintia hills)[9] and the headquarters of the district were

shifted from Cherrapunji to Yewduh,[10] a place named after a local market and renamed in 1866 as Shillong, after the local deity inhabiting the highest hill. The British Khasi and Jaintia District consisted of the hill territories of the former Jaintia raja, the 31 British villages acquired from the other Khasi chiefs and a part of the town of Shillong 'ceded' by the Mylliem siemship.

On 13 November 1866, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal issued two orders constituting the Naga Hills District, 'consisting of that part of the district of Nowgong which lies on the right bank of the river Dhansari, the Naga Hills and the country on both banks of the river Doyang' and ordering Lieutenant J. Gregory, the officer in charge of the North Cachar Subdivision, to take over as deputy commissioner of the new district.[11] He was instructed to 'do his best by tact and good management, supported by a moderate display of physical force to bring that portion of the hill tract adjacent to the plains into order'. A conciliatory demeanour, 'perhaps the expenditure of a little money to leading men' and, if that failed, 'punitive measures' were advised. Necessary roads had to be constructed in a simple and inexpensive manner 'just sufficient for the opening of the country to the extent actually required'.[12] There were some good results from these steps in the 'friendly' village of Samuguting. But government policy with regard to the Naga remained hesitant for a long time. In December 1867, the Lieutenant-Governor defined the district's boundary as extending up to the Doyang river on the east. In the rules for administration of justice issued in 1872, the Naga hills were called an 'agency' and the deputy commissioner was renamed 'Political Agent'.

With the appointment of an officer at Tura in 1866, arrangements were made for roads, buildings and police in the Garo hills as in the Naga hills, but with 'more immediate and complete' success. 'It was at the outset the policy', Mackenzie said, 'that no attempt should be made to coerce any neutral independent clan, but all voluntary submission was frankly accepted'.[13] The revenue survey of Mymensingh in 1857 had earlier laid down the northern borders of that district on the Garo foothills. On a petition by the Susang raja, however, the High Court ruled that the map did not represent the true boundary of the raja's estate. The government therefore passed the Garo Hills Act (Act XXII) of 1869 defining the Garo Hills

District as 'bounded on the north and west by the District of Gawalpara, on the south by the District of Mymensingh as defined by the Revenue Survey, and on the east by the Khasi Hills', and removing it from the jurisdiction of the civil, criminal and revenue courts and other offices established under the Bengal Regulations and Acts.

Act VI of 1835 (insofar as it is related to the Khasi–Jaintia hills) and Regulation X of 1822 were repealed. No subsequent Act of the Governor-General-in-Council would extend to any part of the territory, unless it was specifically provided for. The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal could extend the Act to the British portion of the Khasi, Jaintia and Naga hills. The Act came into force in the Garo Hills District on 1 March 1870, and was extended to the Naga Hills, the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills Districts on 1 November 1871.[14] The zamindars were forbidden to collect taxes and revenues from the Garo hills. The Garo Hills Regulation of 1876, reissued in 1882, restricted the exploitation of the Garo forest resources by non-Garos.

There was trouble in the Garo hills in 1870 and again in 1881–82, with the encouragement of the neighbouring zamindars. After suppressing the latter revolt, the deputy commissioner reported that the *laskars* (fiscal officers in charge of circles of villages) and the *nokmas* (village headmen) had, on the whole, 'behaved well'. The laskars had not yet acquired very much influence or authority though the deputy commissioner hoped that in time they would.[15]

Between the Lines

Segregation was the initial British policy for the frontiers. Section 2 of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 made it lawful for the government 'to prescribe, and from time to time alter by notification ... a line to be called the Inner Line and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving therein'. The Inner Line, according to Mackenzie, was 'defined merely for the purpose of jurisdiction' and did not 'decide the sovereignty beyond'. 'The active control of the district officer need not necessarily extend up to the boundary, but it must, under no circumstances, be carried further. Beyond

this line the tribes are left to manage their own affairs with only such interference on the part of the frontier officers in their political capacity as may be considered advisable with the view to establishing a personal influence for good among the chiefs and the tribes.'[16] Till 1882 it covered only the Himalayan frontiers and the eastern part of the Naga hills. However, by 1942, when north Cachar was Inner Lined, all the hills except the Khasi, the Garo and the Mikir were encircled.

A somewhat confusing situation arose out of the concept of 'political control' on an ever expanding frontier. After the occupation of Kohima and Wokha in 1878 for instance, 'the general policy appears to have been one of consolidating our rule around those two countries.'[17] Even in 1882, 'our writ ran only in an area covering Kohima and Wokha and their immediate neighbourhood.'[18] Outside this zone, the policy was one of occasional 'promenades' and pacification of the tribes but the local officials took every opportunity to extend their authority. In 1883 the Government of India expressed its preference for 'the existing methods of checking and punishing border offences', and approved of 'the arrangement under which the political control of the Nagas to the east of the Lhota country (Wokha)... will be made over to the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills' with the reservation that interference with inter-tribal quarrels should, as a rule, be limited to those cases which involved: (1) outrages on British subjects; (2) violation of the Inner Line; (3) danger to the interests of people dwelling inside the British borders by reason of the proximity of disturbances outside, such disturbances, for instance, as would be likely to intimidate coolies employed upon tea estates or cultivators.[19]

To describe the limits of 'political control' a phrase – the Outer Line – found place in administrative usage. The Outer Line had no connection with the international frontier. After the annexation of upper Burma and the drawing of the McMahon Line the phrase lost currency. But 'political control' survived it. In the control area there was no taxation or prohibition of war and headhunting. But the government reserved the right of intervention in cases of such conflicts leading to excesses.[20]

In later days, as the areas of political control, particularly in the Naga hills, went on being converted into areas of administrative control, administration was extended across

the Inner Line, the first such incident being the establishment of an outpost at Mokokchung in 1890. Movement of non-officials continued to be restricted. Subsequently, the Inner Line went on being drawn, covering a much vaster area and permitting only the officials and persons approved by them, like missionaries, within the zone. By the end of the British period, administration had spread over all the hills except the areas covered by the Himalayan Frontier Tracts and the so-called Naga Tribal Area.

The Scheduled District

Shortly after the enforcement of the Government of India Act of 1870, on 6 February 1874 the Governor-General by two notifications took upon himself the administration of some of the eastern districts of Bengal and constituted them into the Chief Commissioner's Province of Assam. Following this, two very important Acts were passed in 1874 by the Governor-General-in-Council to set up an all-India pattern for the administration of those areas that might be declared as 'backward tracts'. The first was the Scheduled Districts Act (Act XVI) of 1874 passed on 8 December 1874, 'to provide readier means than now exist for ascertaining the enactments' in force in the various parts of British India, which till then had not been under *all* the general Acts and Regulations. Section 3 of the Act provided that the local governments, with the previous sanction of the Governor-General-in-Council could, by notification, declare enactments which were or were not actually in force in any part of any such district.

According to Section 6 of the Act, local governments could from time to time:

(a) appoint officers to administer civil and criminal justice, to superintend the settlement and collection of the public revenue and all matters relating to the rent and otherwise to conduct the administration within the Scheduled District,
(b) regulate the officers so appointed, but not so as to restrict the operation of any enactment for the time being in force in any of the said districts,

(c) direct by what authority any jurisdiction, powers and duties incident to the operation of any enactment for the time being in force in such district shall be exercised or performed.[21]

The whole of the chief commissionership of Assam was to be a scheduled district, but the Act was declared to be in force in Assam by the Governor-General only on 3 November 1877. The Extent of Local Laws Act (Act XV) of 1874 restricted the application of the General Acts and Regulations in the scheduled districts. With the enforcement of Act XIV of 1874, the Garo Hills Act of 1869 and Act VI of 1835 were repealed.

After the constitution of the chief commissionership of Assam, the chief commissioner, Keating, pressed for a gradual extension of control. In 1878 the Supreme Government finally approved of the plan and the headquarters of the Naga hills were pushed deep into the Angami country, to Kohima, while another administrative centre was opened at Wokha in the Lhota country. On 2 May 1881, Charles A. Elliot, chief commissioner of Assam, submitted a comprehensive memorandum on the administrative organisation of the Naga hills.[22] Though 'the final decision to make the Naga hills a British District was taken in 1881',[23] the Governor-General's letter sanctioning the plan and restoring the title of deputy commissioner to the Naga hills' administrator, known as Political Agent since 1872, was issued only on 24 April 1882.[24] Elliot's proposal for equal levy of forced labour and disarmament of the Angami was partly accepted.

In 1880 the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation (Regulation 2) of 1880 was issued, 'to provide for the removal of certain frontier tracts in Assam inhabited or frequented by barbarous or semi-civilised tribes from the operation of enactments in force therein'. The Regulation empowered the chief commissioner to declare (with the previous sanction of the Governor-General) from time to time, that any enactment in force in a frontier tract, would cease to operate, but without affecting the criminal jurisdiction of any court over European British subjects.

On 8 November 1882, for the first time a frontier tract in the northeastern corner of Assam, namely the Dibrugarh Frontier Tract, was established. F. J. Needham was appointed Assistant Political Officer for the tract and stationed at Sadiya, under the direct authority of the deputy commissioner of Lakhimpur

District, who had the overall administrative responsibility while the Assistant Political Officer had an advisory role.[25] Creation of this tract was followed by the applicability to it of the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880,[26] opening the sub-Himalayan frontier in the northeast to British control. Soon the system of frontier administration was applied to other hill areas, even those deep inside the Assam territory.

Doubts had meanwhile been expressed about the applicability of the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1872, as the Scheduled Districts Act had repealed the Garo Hills Act but not the Code. So the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulations (Regulation 3) of 1884 was issued by the Governor-General to empower the extension of the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880 to the hills which, though not frontier tracts within the meaning of that Regulation, were 'inhabited or frequented by barbarous or semi-civilised tribes.' The Regulation which declared that the Code of Criminal Procedure 'shall be deemed never to have come into force in the Garo Hills District, the Naga Hills District and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District', was extended to the Naga Hills District on 22 April 1884[27] and the north Cachar hills on the same day,[28] to the Garo hills and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts on 5 November 1884[29] and to the Mikir hills on 12 November 1884.[30] The Code of Criminal Procedure was later applied in parts in the hill districts.[31]

In 1890 J. W. Quinton, the chief commissioner of Assam, proposed the taking over of the north Lushai hills and sent his personal assistant, Captain Browne, as the Political Officer to Fort Aijal, with orders to 'keep moving about among the chiefs with the object of establishing political influence and control over them.'[32] But it was only on 6 September 1895 that the *de facto* position in the North Lushai Hills District 'which had persisted since 1890, apparently without formal legal sanction, was regularised by a proclamation.[33] On 12 January 1890, D. R. Lyall, the commissioner of Chittagong Division, proposed the placing of the south Lushai hills under a superintendent or a Political Officer, separately from the Chittagong Hill Tract.[34] Accordingly, on 1 April 1891 the South Lushai Hills District was constituted with a superintendent over it. The administration entailed only fringe contact with the hills, through the holding of an annual fair at Rangamati, where the autonomous chiefs

and headmen were required to pay their respects to the commissioner. Administration, 'at least for the present', would be confined to preserving the public peace. Falam's chief, under Burma, and some eastern Lushai chiefs, defied the government in 1894–95.[35] After the suppression of the revolt, British Burma's control was brought further west of the Manipur river up to Fort Tregear in February 1897.[36]

The move for administrative unification of the Chin–Lushai hills[37] seems to have been foiled by Alexander Mackenzie, then chief commissioner of Burma, who also persuaded the Government of India against too much administration of the Lushai.[38] The whole area took a long time to be brought under administrative control, the last to be brought in as late as 1924 being the Lakher region. The Chin areas remained with Burma. On 1 April 1898, the south and the north Lushai hills were merged into one Lushai Hills District within Assam[39] and the Lushai Hills rules for administration of justice were issued.[40] The Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880 was extended over the district.[41] Before this, however, the Chin Hills Regulation (Regulation V) of 1896, passed on August 13, had authorised the superintendent or the deputy commissioner to order any undesirable outsider to leave the area[42] and to tax the residents, permanent or temporary, houses, clans and villages. On 9 October 1911, the Regulation was extended to the north Cachar hills, the Garo hills, the Khasi and Jaintia hills (excluding the Shillong municipal and cantonment area where only the provision for taxation would apply), the Naga hills and the Mikir hills.[43]

Exclusion from Reforms

Under the Government of India Act of 1915, the power of the Governor-General to make regulations for the peace and good government of the country, upon drafts submitted by the local governments was retained (Section 71). The Assam General Clauses Act of 1915 provided that no local Act would come into force in the 'backward tracts' unless expressly extended to them under the Scheduled Districts Act.

During discussions on the hills under the Montford Reforms,

official opinion in Assam varied widely. Chief Commissioner Archdale Earle supported the exclusion of the areas from the scheme of the reforms while senior officials wanted the Garo, Mikir and north Cachar hills to be included in it.[44] The central government had no eagerness to bear the expenses of an 'excluded' administration and, contrary to the Montford recommendations, adopted a uniform pattern of 'partial exclusion'. The notification for partial exclusion under the Government of India Act of 1919 said that the Governor-in-Council could bar the application of any local law from such an area or provide for exceptions or modifications in such a law. When the provincial legislature legislated solely for a partially excluded area, it had to provide that the Governor could bar its application and provide for exceptions or modifications in its application in any partially excluded area. The competence of the provincial legislature over the partially excluded areas was thus restricted.

In the Legislative Assembly of Assam, one member was nominated from the entire partially excluded area. At first a Garo was chosen for that seat. But in view of his so-called shortcomings in language, a Welsh Presbyterian missionary was nominated in his place in 1924. Finally a Gorkha was taken. Naturally the Indian Statutory Commission considered the representation inadequate.[45] However, in the administrative sphere the Governor had a special responsibility for the 'backward tracts' and all matters concerning them needed his approval. In respect of these areas, therefore, 'dyarchy' had little meaning. Among them, again, the Naga and the Lushai hills and the unadministered portions of the frontier tracts were treated as special inasmuch as judicial appeals from them went to the Governor and were treated as 'political'.[46]

The position of Shillong, only a part of which had been 'ceded' by the siem of Mylliem, was somewhat peculiar. Jurisdiction of the Shillong municipality, founded in 1910, went beyond the 'British territory' by virtue of the government's 'foreign jurisdiction'. The legality of the creation of the Shillong urban constituency under the Government of India Act of 1919 was challenged in 1928 by a no-confidence motion against Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, a minister who had been elected from that constituency and who lived in the siemship area like the majority of his voters.[47] The Government of Assam moved the Government

of India and got the electoral rules amended. Later, a judicial suit challenging the election was lost.[48]

The Government of Assam told the Simon Commission that in the interests both of the backward tracts and the rest of the province, 'the present artificial union should be ended. The backward tracts should be excluded from the province of Assam and be administered by the Governor-in-Council, as agent of the Governor-General-in-Council at the cost of the central revenues.'[49] The separation thus proposed was not territorial but constitutional. The suggestion was based on the recommendation of J. H. Hutton, then deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills District, that 'in the interests of the plains districts' the hill districts 'should be withdrawn from the reformed constitution altogether and that as soon as possible.'[50] Hutton had forwarded a less innocent suggestion from the superintendent of the Lushai Hills District, N. E. Parry, for:

a) a hill division comprising all the 'backward' tracts,
b) a province including the Assam hills and any other hill or 'backward tracts' in Burma which could be suitably included, with possible headquarters at Kohima.[51]

The Indian Statutory Commission could not appreciate the prevailing system of exclusion because even though some of these areas had homogeneously backward populations, others had mixed populations. The homogeneously backward tracts had indeed to be excluded from ministerial administration and the ordinary competence of the federal and provincial legislatures. Administration of such areas would be vested in the Governor-General acting through the Governors. As for the tracts to be chosen for partial exclusion, the commission recommended that they 'should continue to return representatives' to the provincial legislatures. The Governor as the agent of the Governor-General-in-Council would decide how far legislations enacted by the provincial legislature would apply to them. 'They will be under the same system of taxation, for provincial purposes, as the rest of the provinces, and the provincial revenues raised within them must be spent upon them.' The additional funds needed would come from central revenues. The administration of these areas, however, would vest with the Government of India acting through the Governor. But the commission suggested that 'rules should be made to

provide how far the Governor in exercise of his agency duties would act in consultation with the Ministers of the province who would advise him in the discharge of these responsibilities'.[52] Thus the partially excluded areas would have a status equal to that of the backward tracts under dyarchy, subject to the rules about the application of the Governor's discretion. Proposal No. 108 of Ramsay MacDonald envisaged the principle of exclusion of the 'backward tracts' under the schemes of reforms. The Government of India Bill of 1933 proposed that the powers of the federal and provincial legislatures would not extend to any part of a province declared to be an excluded or a partially excluded area. In the case of the former, the Governor himself would direct the administration, while in the case of the latter he would have a 'special responsibility'.

According to the Simon Commission, the Governor would also be empowered to make regulations having the force of law for the peace and good government of any excluded or partially excluded area, subject to the prior consent of the Governor- General. The provision of the Bill relating to such regulations was very much similar to that under the Government of India Act of 1870. But the joint select committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms (session 1933–34) held that 'a distinction might well be drawn in this (Regulation-making) respect between Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas, and that the application of Acts to, or the framing of Regulations for, Partially Excluded Areas is an executive act which might appropriately be performed by the Governor on the advice of his ministers, the decisions taken in each case being, of course, subject to the Governor's special responsibility for Partially Excluded Areas, that is to say, being subject to his right to differ from the proposals of his Ministers if he thinks fit.'[53]

The Government of India Act of 1935 in part III, chapter IV, Section 91, required the Secretary of State for India to formulate the order, for the consideration of Parliament, declaring the excluded and partially excluded areas to be recommended to the Crown for his assent. His Majesty was also authorised to make 'partially excluded' the whole or a part of an excluded area, to direct that the whole or a part of a partially excluded area would cease to be so, to rectify their boundaries and to readjust them subsequent upon the alteration of boundaries between

provinces. According to Section 92, the executive authority of the province would extend to excluded and partially excluded areas therein. Yet, no federal or provincial legislative Act would apply to any such area without the Governor's direction. While issuing such direction the Governor could modify its application in the area. The Governor would make regulations for the peace and good government of any such area, subject to the approval of the Governor-General. Subsection 3 of the Section laid down that the Governor's powers in respect of the excluded areas would be exercised in his discretion, that is, outside the scope of ministerial advice. The Governor had a 'special responsibility' in respect of the partially excluded areas [Section 52(1) (e)], to be discharged in his 'individual judgement'. The Governor had the discretion to decide when he was required to act in his individual judgement.

The Simon Commission envisaged the exclusion of all the Assam hills except 'possibly' the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, though the excluded areas were not to be treated as 'minor administration' entirely outside the borders of the Governor's province.[54] In recommending full or partial exclusion the Secretary of State sought to follow two principles: (1) exclusion must be based upon strict necessity and should be as limited as possible; and (2) partial exclusion must be based on the preponderance of aboriginal or very backward people of sufficient size.[55] The Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order of 1936 declared the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District, the North Cachar Subdivision of the Cachar District and the frontier tracts as excluded areas. The Garo Hills District, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District (excluding Shillong) and the Mikir hill tracts of the Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts were declared as partially excluded areas. The latter got franchise.

One of the major reasons for British hesitation to spread administration on the border hills – especially the Naga and the Himalayan borders – was the consideration of expenses. In July 1928, the memorandum of the Assam government to the Simon Commission calculated the total annual deficit for hills administration at about Rs 6.5 lakh. Only the Jaintia hills (partly settled) and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract (plains) showed a surplus. Neither the government nor the political

parties of Assam were interested in tagging the hill districts with the constitutional government of Assam.[56]

Under the 1935 Act the revenue allocation for partially excluded areas was votable while that for excluded areas was 'charged on' the revenue of the province. The result of this distinction was not very happy. The partially excluded areas, particularly the Mikir hills, were in a sad state.[57]

The Twilight Zone of Power

The varying circumstances in which British authority was extended over eastern India may explain the different forms of that authority over the different areas. To start with, Sikkim and Bhutan were never annexed to the British Raj, presumably because of their international significance, nor were they reduced to the status of 'native states'. Technically they were vassals of the British Indian government which exercised considerable authority in the internal affairs of these principalities. The 'native states' on the southern side of the Himalayas – Cooch Behar, Tripura, the 25 Khasi siemships and Manipur – were only nominally independent, and the government exercised its authority through Political Agents. Thus, between 1871 and 1878 a full-time officer, and from 1878 the district magistrate of the British district of Tripura was the Political Agent of the Governor of Bengal to Hill Tripura. The deputy commissioner of the British Khasi and Jaintia Hills District acted as Political Agent to the Khasi states of, first the chief commissioner of Assam, then the Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, and finally the Governor of Assam. A separate Political Agent was appointed for Manipur to represent the head of the Assam government.

The extent of authority exercised on different states at different times was frequently based on doubtful theories and was not uniform. Until the middle of the nineteenth century the British authorities 'recognised' the rulers through various 'agreements' and extracted various kinds of advantages. In 1765 the Tripura king is said to have tendered allegiance to the East India Company. Yet Aitchison said, 'The British Government has no treaty with Tipperah, nor does it receive any tribute.'[58]

In 1773 the Cooch Behar king sought British assistance against Bhutanese aggression, agreeing to the annexation of Cooch Behar to Bengal. In 1776 a *sanad* was issued conferring the zamindari right on the Cooch Behar prince. In 1862 Viceroy Canning granted the raja a sanad enabling him to adopt his successor. In that sanad Cooch Behar was mentioned as a 'state'. 'In 1873, a question arose as to whether Cooch Behar should be designated a "state", an "estate" or a "Raj; the decision was that the designation "state" which had been used in the adoption sanad granted the Raja of Cooch Behar, by Lord Canning, should remain unaltered. Cooch Behar now, therefore, bears the designation "state".'[59] In a similarly doubtful way, in 1891 the government took over the administration of Manipur and decreed that Manipur was a subordinate native state.[60] In 1907, the *gaddi* was restored to the royal family but the Manipur hill areas came under the virtual control of the British official designated as president of the Manipur Durbar.[61] Until 1858 the Khasi chiefs were accorded 'recognition' through treaties on behalf of the Viceroy. Since 1859 they had to execute agreements before succession and were granted sanads of 'appointment' after it by the deputy commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia hills.[62]

Foreign Jurisdiction

An intriguing part was played by the concept of 'foreign jurisdiction', through which the Viceroy's authority over the native 'states' was exercised. The 1858 proclamation of Queen Victoria guaranteed the integrity of the territories of the native rulers, thus placing in the Viceroy a guardian's role *vis-à-vis* the states. The General Clauses Act of 1868 first defined 'British India' as 'the territory for the time being vested in Her Majesty' by the Government of India Act of 1858 which, however, had not used the words 'British India'.

After the enactment of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Act X of 1872) the Foreign Jurisdiction and Extradition Act (Act XI of 1872) was passed to enforce it 'within diverse places beyond the limits of British India', wherein 'by treaty, capitulation, agreement, grant, usage, sufferance and other lawful means the Governor-General-in-Council has power and jurisdiction'.

It did not define the source of such power and authority, but only sought to lay down the modes of their exercise. After the enactment of the Criminal Procedure Code of 1878, another Foreign Jurisdiction and Extradition Act was passed in 1879.

The Interpretation Act of 1889 first defined 'India' as 'British India together with any territories of any native prince or chief under the suzerainty of Her Majesty' and the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890 superseded the Foreign Jurisdiction and Extradition Act of 1879. On 13 June 1902, a Foreign Jurisdiction Order in Council was passed in the Court at Buckingham Palace 'by virtue of and in exercise of the powers by the Foreign Jurisdiction Act, 1890, or otherwise, in His Majesty vested.' The scope of this Order, according to Ilbert, was 'very wide' and covered the 'transborder tribes'.[63] This author, however, failed to trace any evidence of the application of foreign jurisdiction to the 'unadministered' Nagas. In any case, it did not prevent the bringing of any area inhabited by them within British India.

The phrase 'tribal areas' was invented by the Government of India Act of 1935 which defined them as 'the areas along the frontiers of India or in Baluchistan which are not part of British India or of Burma or of any Indian State or of any foreign State' [Section 311(1)]. 'India' was defined in the same Section as 'British India together with all territories of any Indian Ruler under the sovereignty of His Majesty, all territories under the suzerainty of such an Indian Ruler, the tribal areas, and, any other territories which His Majesty in Council may, from time to time...declare to be part of India.' The scope of 'foreign jurisdiction' was confined only to the native states (Section 294) and the tribal area was placed under the executive authority of the Governor-General [Section 313(2)(C)] to be exercised by Governors in their discretion as the Governor-General's agents [Section 123(1)]. A new Indian Foreign Jurisdiction Order, passed on 18 March 1937 in the Court at Buckingham Palace, under the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890, excluded the 'tribal areas' in India from the scope of the order 'without prejudice, however, to the validity of anything previously done thereunder'. The Governor of Assam was directed to discharge, as the agent of the Governor-General-in-Council of India, 'in and in relation to the tribal area beyond the external boundaries of the province of Assam all functions hitherto discharged in, and

in relation to, the said area by the said Governor as the agent to the Governor-General in respect of the political control of the trans-border tribes, the administration of the said areas and the administration of the Assam Rifles and the Armed Civil Forces.'[64] This peculiar legal status of the area was ended only after the transfer of power.

Notes and References

1 Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, 1771 to 1826, Gauhati, 1949, pp. 33–34.
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CHAPTER 2

Perspectives of a New Personality

Early British records about the hills of northeast India are almost uniformly contemptuous of the 'savage', 'barbarous' and 'primitive' tribes, while the later ones are eloquent about their 'difference' between them and the neighbouring plains people. The change occurred after the hills had been brought under effective control and *divide et impera* had become the instrument of imperial policy.[1]

The blanket label of primitiveness arose out of the hill people's way of dressing, warlike habits and attachment to the condemned systems of headhunting, human sacrifice and slavery. Civilised people, on the other hand, can be accused of the sophisticated practice of the same vices. Human sacrifice has been known to many a great religion. Yet these 'savages' treated their slaves much better than the civilised did. Slaves here were treated harshly only during the initial period.[2] After a period of service they would be regarded as members of their masters' families.[3] N. E. Parry declined to consider the semi-serfdom of the indebted Chin–Lushai to the chief as 'slavery'. He preferred to call it 'dependence'.[4] Of course, among some Naga groups slave sacrifice for satisfying the spirits, driving out epidemics and purchasing peace – by equalising the number of the dead among the feuding villages[5] – was not uncommon.

Yet the Angami, the legendary headhunters of the Naga hills, were brilliant terrace cultivators in pre-British days. The rice yield of the Chakhesang formerly known as the western Angami, is high compared to the all-India average. The Sema, another object of early horror tales, prepared salt from brine springs. Cotton was widely cultivated and some of the eastern Indians were among the world's best weavers. Iron was in use in almost all the hills and some of the hill people were skilled iron smelters. Early British contact with the Lushai revealed that they were 'endowed with an

intelligence which has enabled them to discover for themselves the manufacture of gunpowder'.[6] Their tools were primitive – usually the hoe and the *dao* (chopper) – their skills were not.

For the hill population as a whole, it can by no means be said that contact with the outside world was wholly absent. The Garos of the plains maintained a connection with the Garos of the hills and the traders of Mymensingh. The Kachari had connections with the Angami and the Kuki with the Lushai. The Sema, the Lhota or the Ao traded with the Brahmaputra valley. The duars at the foothills of the Himalayas were regular marketing centres for some of the Himalayan people, who carried on trade with the Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan and Tibet. Speaking of the Jaintia, who have a civilised history since the sixteenth century, Chie Nakane wrote:

> Such a highly developed economic system as based on wet-rice cultivation, must have developed a great deal in forming a kingdom adjoining the plain. Through the common economy and political organisation with the Hindus of the plains, the Hindu civilization of the Bengal Plain penetrated deeply among the Jaintias, who are matrilinial hill dwellers.[7]

Such contact took place in the case of the Meithei who, as Hodson guessed in 1908, were two hundred years earlier the hill people of his time,[8] and in the case of the Tripuri and the Koch as well. The Kachari, like the Koch and the Tripuri, are supposed to be a branch of the Bodo and have to their credit the Kachari kingdom at Dimapur dating back to the sixteenth century. The shifting of the Kachari kingdom to the hills of the present day north Cachar in the eighteenth century, under Ahom pressure, illustrates how many of the 'tribes' were pushed into the hill terrains by invaders. The claim to the Kamakhya temple (the leading centre of the Hindu mother cult at Gauhati) in the Khasi tradition points to the possibility of their having been pushed into their present abode by the Koch. The Garo legends describe their long wanderings in the Brahmaputra valley before their settlement in the Garo hills of today. The Tripuri may in the same way have uprooted the Reang and their affinities. Thus the hill people of eastern India could by no means be described as uniformly primitive. The opposite statement would also be

incorrect. Several groups of hill people had carried elements of civilisation to the land in which they settled. Several others acquired it through contact with their advanced neighbours. It was only when such contact was absent – generally in the deep hills – that primitive ways of life persisted. The isolation ascribed to the hill people, therefore, could only be relative. It was caused more by ecological conditions than by their allegedly closed mind.

Paradox of Tribalism

Fredrick Barth is critical of the traditional conception of ethnic boundaries which:

> allows us to assume that boundary maintenance is unproblematical and follows from the isolation which the itemised characteristics imply: racial difference, cultural difference, social separation and language barriers, spontaneous and organised enmity. This also limits the range of factors that we use to explain cultural diversity. We are led to imagine each group developing its cultural and social form in relative isolation, mainly in response to local ecological factors.[9]

Edmund Leach speaks in the same tone when he throws a challenge to the works of Hutton, Mills, Parry and others on the hill people of eastern India:

> In all these books it is taken as axiomatic that the group which speaks a distinct language or dialect is, by definition, a separate tribe or a tribal section. Each such section is then treated as a distinct cultural and ethnographic entity with a distinct history and separate continuity in time... The Sema and the Angami (Nagas) are geographically adjacent, but they are not represented as interacting in any institutional sense. This whole approach seems to me to rest on false premises.[9]

Assuming, therefore, that geographical contact inevitably leads to constant interaction, Barth has reduced ethnic groups to 'categories of ascription'.[11]

> Ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behaviour, i.e., persisting cultural differences. Yet, where persons of different cultures interact, one would expect these differences to be reduced since interaction both requires and guarantees a congruence of codes and values—in other words, a similarity or community of culture.[12]

In the eastern Indian hills the broad ethnic denominations, such as the Garo, the Khasi, the Mizo and the Naga roughly correspond to geographically compact areas, though in the border areas of each group one will notice mixed populations like the Lingam (Garo–Khasi) and the Lalung (Mikir–Bodo). Further, within each denomination one will find numerous subgroups aligning themselves according to regional contiguity and, occasionally, on the basis of ethnic assumptions which, due to communication difficulties, are easily magnified. Thus, speaking of the Angami, Hutton noted that:

> In dress, custom, and traditions, isolation has led to divergence no less surely than in dialect and it must not be assumed that a custom set down here as an Angami custom, or a story given as an Angami tradition, will be found in the same form in all Angami villages.[13]

Elsewhere, he recorded an intense feeling of clannishness, even in the same village:

> In war, even though the village is united, the jealousy and suspicion of one clan for another would inevitably be a weakness; in peace the village would from time to time break out into riot, while it is incessantly troubled by internal bickerings.[14]

Much earlier, in the nineteenth century, S. E. Peal wrote that the two distinctive features of the Naga collectivity were that 'the "Naga" has a definite geographical limit', and that 'the race so designated is sub-divided into literally innumerable independent tribes, who are constantly at war with each other.'[15] A recent example of division among the Naga is the formation of the Chakhesang with the Cha-Khrima, the Khe-Zami and the Sang-Tam – all earlier known as the western Angamis.

McCall regretted that since 1780, when the Sailo clan became

'supreme' over the north Lushai hills, 'internecine wars over marriages, lands or plunders induced a lack of control and strength which later precipitated clashes with the inhabitants of their neighbouring districts in British India.'[16] In the southern hills lived groups of Chin people calling themselves Pawi and Lakher but designated by the Arrakanese as Shendu.[17] Their clashes with the Lushai were as frequent as marital exchanges. After Indian Independence their political differences led to the establishment of a separate regional council for the Pawi–Lakher people who were themselves split in 1970, resulting in the demand for two separate councils. Referring to the Manipur hill people, a Kabui intellectual lamented that 'the lack of common ideals and destiny among the hill people and a strong desire to keep their identity' were behind the mushrooming of tribal organisations. 'Though the Naga independence movement has produced a binding force of unity among the Manipur Nagas, the Naga groups are yet to forge a meaningful unity.'[18] The differences between the Christian and non-Christian Nagas, apart from the existence of a large number of Kukis interspersed among them, stand in the way of unity in the Manipur hills. The Zemi, Liangmei and Roungmei Nagas of north Cachar (where they are concentrated), Manipur and Nagaland want a district of their own, preferably within Nagaland, and have assumed a collective identity – the Zeliangruong – drawing inspiration from the prophet movement of the 1930s led by Zadonang and Rani Guidiliu. On the other hand, the ethnocentric and anti-Christian Kabui Association is inclined towards Manipur.

In the Khasi–Jaintia hills the relatively advanced Jaintia were always apprehensive of the more numerous Khasi, their close kin. Administrative policy and even religious differences have contributed to their differences. At the time of the commencement of the Constitution, the Mikir and the Kachari, two branches of the great Bodo race, were put together as two autonomous units in one administrative district. They were separated into two administrative districts in February 1970. In the Garo hills, the Hajong, the Rabha and numerous other groups assert themselves as minorities.

Thus, hill societies in northeast India present the picture of a continuum between consolidation and fragmentation. The alignments are frequently determined by one or more of the

following factors: (1) geographical proximity, (2) exposure to external influences, and (3) parochial values or interests. The first two factors constitute the periphery while the third forms the core of the vibrations.

Political Exposure

At the time of the advent of British power in India there were, apart from thousands of independent village communities, six major Hinduised states in the eastern region – the Koch, the Tripuri, the Jaintia, the Kachari, the Ahom and the Meithei (Imphal valley). All their ruling families enjoyed pseudo-Kshatriya caste status as well as the Brahminical ritual service. Some of them even had marital relations with north Indian Hindu families though such intercourse was an exception rather than the rule. The relatively affluent and advanced hill people, in turn, got access to the pseudo-Kshatriya society and the people on the bordering plains.

It was when the political power of the states was lost, and when in the wake of administration several upper caste Hindus were brought into the region, that the whilom pseudo-Kshatriyas were reduced to the status of parias. (British administrative policy later magnified the differences among the castes as well as between the people of the hills and the plains, and all the categories of 'backward castes' and 'tribes' emerged in due course. The Constitution of India retained them as the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes.)

The immediate impact of British power on the hills was territorial. When in 1832 upper Assam was restored to a subordinate monarchy, the prince was granted a limited authority on criminal, and an unlimited authority on civil justice.[19] This pattern was later applied in the administration of the hill areas where the total application of *Pax Britannica* was evidently impossible. The standardised sanads granted to the Khasi chiefs, who still maintained their independence, gave them some nominal authority but their wastelands and minerals were liable to be exploited at the pleasure of the British government. In relation to their people, however, the chiefs became 'rajas'. In the British villages, on the other hand, the

traditional chiefs were converted into agents of administration with formalised authority.

After the enactment of the Garo Hills Act of 1869, the rules for administration of justice in the Garo hills were issued for the first time by the Lieutenant Governor.[20] On 6 August 1872, the rules for administration of justice and police in the Naga hills and the rules for administration of justice in the Khasi and Jaintia hills were issued.[21] The duly recognised village authorities were given the power to try all civil and ordinary criminal disputes. The district officer, the commissioner and the Lieutenant-Governor would try appeals.

The civil laws of the hill societies were based on an innumerable variety of customs and the government had no intention of changing them. However, a year before the passing of the Garo Hills Act in 1868, William Hunter had regretted that 'if our criminal system is sometimes harsh to the aboriginal races our law of property seems to many of them wholly inexplicable.'[22] Hence the formal protection of the 1869 Act. On the other hand, the straightforward criminal justice of the hill people often resulted in inter-group feuds and some check was considered necessary. Under the rules, police forces in the hill areas were constituted by an insignificant number of regular policemen (according to Act V of 1861) and the rural police, consisting of the village heads, some of whom were appointed local revenue collectors under the various names of *laskars* (Garo hills), *sirdars* and dollois (Khasi–Jaintia hills) and *mauzadars* (Naga hills). These village authorities were empowered to try petty criminal cases and impose fines up to Rs 50 within their respective jurisdictions. All persons accused of heinous crimes (which since 1870 had been defined by various regulations as consisting of rebellion, rioting, possessing or passing counterfeit coins, murder, causing wounds amounting to injury to life or limb, rape, theft, robbery, dacoity, theft of cattle, arson, housebreaking and forgery) had to be surrendered to the officials. Misconduct by the regular police was punishable only by the officials, by a fine of up to Rs 500 or imprisonment. Village trials had to be open, *verbatim* and without the assistance of professional lawyers. Appeals from a district officer's judgment would not go to any court but to the higher executive.

The rules for administration of justice in the hill districts (Garo, Naga and Khasi and Jaintia) were slightly modified and republished in 1874.[23] When the Naga Hills Agency was reconstituted as a district, a fresh set of rules was issued for it. When the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation was applied to the hill districts, the rules were reissued with slight modifications and two specialities. First, the Mikir Hills Tract, created as a frontier tract within the administered districts of Nowgong and Sibsagar got the rules only for criminal justice. Secondly, the eastern duars of the district of Goalpara, which were not brought under the Frontier Tracts Regulation in spite of being on the border of Bhutan, got only the rules for civil justice.[24] After the constitution of the Lieutenant Governor's Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam on 1 September 1905, a fresh set of rules covering civil justice in the Mikir hills was issued in 1906. The eastern duars were completely merged with the plains of Assam in respect of administration of justice, when the Code of Civil Procedure was extended to them in September 1914. The rules were reissued in 1937 before the introduction of provincial autonomy and finally with modifications in 1950, on the eve of the promulgation of the Constitution of free India.

The immediate consequence of the imposition of the rules was an erosion of the clan. Though at the beginning of British rule villages were already inhabited by several clans, the people's primary loyalty was to the clan. Inter-clan disputes used to be solved either in conferences or through clashes. The 'village authority' under the new procedure was a territorial chief and the disputing clans were to accept his verdict. But when they would come with a dispute they would want justice, not the vindication of their respective clans' prestige. An inter-village dispute was, however, beyond the jurisdiction of these authorities and had to be submitted to government officials. Needless to say, the change was not entirely welcomed by the hill people.

While the power of the clan was thus somewhat weakened and the hill people's outlook was slightly widened, hardly could any united view develop among them. Their vision remained confined to a slightly enlarged neighbourhood and could rarely go beyond the district officer who became a virtual despot. The main limitation was in respect of communication and contact.

Until the Second World War, Shillong and the headquarters of the hill districts were indeed connected by roads with the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys; but many of these were not all-weather roads. An important reason for the slow development of communications was that until 1874 (when Assam was constituted into a chief commissioner's province), 'administration' – which till then practically meant domineering contact with the hills – was Bengal oriented. Shillong and Tura had road connections with Sylhet and Mymensingh respectively, earlier than with Kamrup; Lungleh situated deeper south of Aijal, the headquarters of the Mizo district, developed contact with Chittagong earlier than Aijal could with Cachar. Even now there are no road connections between *all* the hill towns. The two administrative centres in Meghalaya, Shillong and Tura were connected by road only in the 1970s. Manipur was connected with Assam by a road through Kohima, built towards the end of the nineteenth century as a cart road. The two ancient routes, one from upper Assam through Burma to China, and the other from Cachar across the Jiri river to Manipur, fell into disuse until the Second World War, when for strategic reasons the Assam part of the former was mended and improved.

Religious Exposure

The most tangible impact of external contact on the hill societies was religious. In pre-British days Hinduism had the most important influence. Buddhism came to the hills from Burma and Tibet. Sections of Khampti and Singhpo in upper Assam and Chakma in the Lushai and Chittagong hills were mostly immigrants from Burma, while the Monpas and their kin in NEFA subscribed to the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Islam had almost no place in the hills except through a few immigrants. Such migrations took place from Arrakan to the Chittagong hills and from the plains of Mymensingh and Sylhet to the Garo and Khasi hills and Manipur. The Momins (Muslims) are said to have descended from Garo–Muslim cross-marriages and some siems of the border regions of the Khasi hills are believed to have been born of Muslim forefathers. In 1799 and 1825, two Muslim pretenders to messianic power created disturbances

among the Kachari and the Garo.[25] In the first instance Aga Muhammad Reza, an Iranian Muslim adventurer, with the help of some Kukis overpowered the Kachari king Govinda Chandra and attacked the East India Company's station of Bonasye. But he was ultimately suppressed by the sepoys sent by the magistrate of Sylhet. In the second case, one Tipu Shah instigated some Garos and Hajongs from the Mymensingh border against the oppressive zamindar of Sherpur; he too was suppressed.

Hinduism was a great success in Hill Tipperah where the 1901 census recorded the strength of the Hindus as 69 per cent, Muslims (almost wholly immigrant plains people) 26 per cent, Buddhists 3 per cent and animists 2 per cent of the population.[26] Much earlier the General Report of the Tripura District described the prevailing religion as 'a form of Hindu idolatry'.[27] The other important Hindu communities are the Meithei living in the Imphal valley, where the religion is supposed to have been introduced as early as the fifteenth century, and the Kachari. All Hindu Meitheis claim to be Kshatriyas (warrior caste), as do members of the Kachari and Tripuri aristocracy. But the bulk of the Kachari and Tripuri are placed at the lowest rungs of the Hindu caste ladder. The Hindu Khasis on the Sylhet side have Kshatriya surnames like Singh and Roy. When the Ahom rulers of upper Assam were Hinduised, they adopted a similar Kshatriya status. In the sixteenth century, Sankara Deva, an Assamese Kayastha (writer caste), started a Vaishnava (Vishnu worship) cult that attracted many 'tribal' people. One of these sects, the Moamaria, revolted against the Sakta (mother worship) Ahom power in the eighteenth century.[28] The influence of Hinduism was so great in the region that in 1881 the census report of Assam noted, 'Whenever they (the hill people) are not protected by mountains or by jungles, the non-Aryan residents invariably have yielded, and are yielding, to the over-powering fascination of the Hindu religion.'[29]

The Brahmo Samaj came to Shillong in the 1870s. In the summer of 1901 Swami Vivekananda visited the Khasi hills. In 1921 the Ramakrishna Mission opened a centre near Cherrapunji and later another one in Shillong. The Ramakrishna Mission, incidentally, is the only mission which has been allowed to open schools in NEFA after Independence.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, no significant progress of Christianity could be recorded in the hills. However, the censuses spoke eloquently of the success of Christianity in the hills. Though statistics about NEFA and Nagaland were not entirely dependable, an integrated religionwise picture of the hills in 1961, furnished by the Deputy Registrar-General of India, is reproduced in Table 2.1:[30]

Table 2.1: Religious Demography of the Northeast–1961

	Percentage				
Tribe	*Hindu*	*Christian*	*Buddhist*	*Tribal*	*Others*
ASSAM (including the Mizo Hills)					
Garo	4.05	37.94	—	57.36	0.65
Kachari	93.63	6.16	0.21	—	—
Khasi	3.53	47.54	—	48.79	0.14
Mikir	75.11	10.28	—	14.24	0.37
Mizo	1.37	96.95	1.54	0.07	0.07
MANIPUR					
Angami	0.16	55.22	—	—	44.62
Gangte	0.04	87.03	—	—	12.13
Hmar	0.12	99.21	—	—	0.67
Kabui	0.28	35.63	—	—	64.19
Kachcha Naga	0.01	44.16	—	—	54.83
Mizo	0.11	99.88	—	—	0.11
Mao	—	22.02	—	—	77.93
Paite	0.23	85.69	—	—	14.08
Tangkhul	0.01	85.09	—	—	14.90
Thaduo	0.47	58.72	—	—	40.81
NAGALAND					
Dimasa	99.79	0.21	—	—	—
Garo	40.67	59.33	—	—	—
Kuki	14.43	54.65	—	3.55	27.73
Mikir	98.72	1.29	—	—	—

(Table contd on next page)

(Table contd)

	Percentage				
Tribe	*Hindu*	*Christian*	*Buddhist*	*Tribal*	*Others*
Naga	3.62	56.12	—	27.51	12.75
(Arunachal Pradesh)					
Aka	—	—	—	50.00	50.00
Apatani	—	—	—	87.18	12.82
Ashing	—	—	—	28.86	77.14
Dafla	1.18	1.77	—	—	97.05
Galong	1.48	1.55	—	33.11	60.86
Khampti	—	—	93.88	—	6.12
Miju	14.02	0.93	—	79.44	5.61
Miniyong	7.49	5.70	—	33.71	53.10
Miri	37.94	2.37	—	39.53	20.16
Mishmi	86.67	0.48	—	3.33	9.12
Monpa	0.34	—	99.66	—	—
Nocte	46.97	1.51	4.55	36.36	10.61
Padam	10.00	23.66	—	19.18	47.21
Sherdukpen	10.00	—	90.00	—	—
Singpho	15.38	—	69.23	15.38	—
Tagin	42.98	0.88	—	49.12	7.02
Tangsa	2.42	1.42	3.03	—	93.34
Wancho	—	—	—	100.00	—

Among the Mizo, Christianity had reached saturation point. Among the Naga as a whole, the percentage of Christians in 1961 was a little over fifty. This indicated that the spread of Christianity had not been adversely affected in the hills after Independence. However, the progress of Christianity had been minimal as government policy discouraged proselytisation. On the other hand, though Christianity came to the Khasi and Garo hills much earlier than to the Mizo and Naga hills, its spread in the latter was more spectacular than in the former. A possible reason was that the Khasi and Garo hills, along with the Mikir and north Cachar hills, were exposed longer and more intensively to non-Christian influences than the Mizo and Naga hills.

A reference to the misplaced charge of alienation against the missionaries is in order here. Speaking of the effect of Baptist

teaching among the Naga, a Naga intellectual has written that conversion to Christianity required the abandonment of indigenous customs and practices of the people rendering them the conviction that the values they had come to treasure in their culture had universal validity. The loyalty of the converts was directed towards their own group and the non-converted were regarded as 'sinners'. The writer concludes that 'the idea of "groupness" is germane to the type of teaching presented to the Nagas.'[31] It is, however, important to note that Christianity did not create the sense of medieval Christian unity. For example, when the Bapist Church in Nagaland was nationalised, it was reorganised as the Angami Association, Ao Association, etc. This is why the allegation that the Church generates extraterritorial loyalty does not stand.

Property and Classes

Anthropological research into the origin of private ownership of land has not yet yielded any satisfactory theory. However, Hutton gave a suggestive picture of the land rights prevailing among the Angami who were, since pre-British days, terrace cultivators. He found that the terraced fields, wood plantations, gardens, building sites, and the greater part of *jhum* land (tract cleared by fire, cultivated for a year or two and then abandoned for another tract) was individual property, subject to life interests and mortgages. They could be sold or otherwise disposed of at the will of the owner, 'though when selling an ancestral field the vendor retains a small fragment in nominal ownership lest he die or suffer misfortune.' However, the jhum land, like land reserved for thatching grass or for the preservation of cane or bridges, was the common property of a kindred or a clan or of the whole village.

> The cultivation of land of this sort is settled either by a system of general consent, arrived at after much discussion and many searchings of heart, or by a system of grab under which the man who wishes to cultivate goes and sets a mark on the land of his choice, and provided that no one else has been there before and that he has not attempted to get so much land as to deprive the

other members of the clan of an opportunity to obtain a similar amount of his claim to cultivate that year and the following year is admitted. A series of cultivations by the same man in the same place appears to set up a private right to the particular plot, and it is no doubt in this way that private rights in land have arisen. In some transfrontier villages all land is still common property of the village. Of course, in jhuming it is the practice for the village, or at any rate the clan, to jhum together, as collective jhuming saves a vast deal of labour in fencing and scaring birds.[32]

Khasi traditions classify land rights broadly into three types: *Ri Kynti* (private land), *Ri Kur* (clan land) and *Ri Raj* (common land). The original families (Bakhraws) constituting a settled clan carved out plots of land in parts of which they would practise shifting cultivation by rotation. Such lands were claimed as heritable and transferable private lands. Some lands would be left fallow with a view to making provision for expansion of population. These plots could be used but not owned. Similarly, when a confederacy of clans constituted a state, some lands would be left fallow for the future use of the community (Ri Raj). In practice, however, Ri Kur is fast being appropriated as Ri Kynti and Ri Raj is being treated as the personal land of the siem. Transfer of lands outside the clan or the confederacy is often connived at, depending upon the influence of the dealers. The process was accentuated when the British government obliged the siems to transfer wastelands that it might require. Thus Shillong town was established on land ceded by the siem of Mylliem.[33]

Rich orange gardens have grown up on the fringes of the Khasi and Garo hills. With reference to such planters in the village of Rombagiri in the Garo hills, Chie Nakane writes:

> I asked these people whether they had the consent of the villagers to make their own gardens, since these are part of the village land. What they replied was "no, we just made them, nobody could object to it, as we have the right to do it". These families, no doubt, belong to the traditional lineage of Rombagiri...and they have an advantageous social status which is closely associated with their economic standing.[34]

British rule was the chief *external* factor to weaken the communal control on land, through the payment of compensation

for land acquisition to 'owners', chiefs and 'rajas', land being an important form of property in the hills. The chief *internal* agency was monetisation which was of course helped by the advent of administration. It was the lure of money which made the Tripura ruler invite Bengali settlers into his territory as early as the sixteenth century, if not earlier. The same consideration led the other hill chiefs to settle Nepali cattle breeders in the hills in the early British days, and businessmen from the plains in the comparatively recent period. Such transfers sometimes border on corruption.

It should be noted that though such alienation is now common in the hills, it has not received the moral sanction of the people. Further, though property is becoming 'private', it is still far from being perfectly individualised. Even in the relatively advanced Khasi society the family is more powerful than the individual in determining ownership, succession and transfer of property.[35]

Strictly speaking, the British were in the hills for less than a century. Consequently, they failed to develop a native base for the administration. The deputy commissioners of the hill districts were, until the transfer of power, all British. The subordinate offices were held by persons from the plains, and in the later days by a few hill people, mostly serving in the capacity of interpreters (*dobhashi*). The first of the interpreters to be elevated to the status of an 'extra-assistant commissioner' in 1858 was a self-educated Khasi, Babu Jeebon Roy. Such officials, constituting bridges between the administration and the chiefs, were the first privileged class in the hills. Occasionally they belonged to the families of chiefs and traders, that is, the wealthy families in the hills.

Growth of administration necessitated the building of small townships within the deep hills, construction of pony or cart roads over the hills, and introduction of money therein. During the two world wars several hill people joined the armed services and saw parts of the outside world. But it was the Second World War which fully exposed the hills to the Japanese and the Allied armies, and to the large world outside. Though trade was not unknown in the hills in pre-British days, the bulk of it was done through barter. Monetisation of the entire hill areas took place with the spread of British administration, and a small business

community consisting of shopkeepers and petty contractors was born among the hill people. A limited amount of Church education acquainted them with elements of western ideas. A few bright young men belonging to affluent families or assisted by the Church went down to the neighbouring plains towns of Assam and Bengal for higher education. The offshoot of limited monetisation and education was the creation of an embryonic middle class in the hills, which of course did not immediately grow into a native 'capitalist class'. The emerging rich class was inclined more towards acquiring landed property than towards undertaking business. Even now the native wealthy class is shy of business. Some have proved successful planters and some have taken to progressive farming.

Achievements of British Rule

The contribution of administration may be summed up under the following categories: establishment of law and order, improvement in communications, introduction of a money economy in the remote areas and, as will be seen, the creation of vested interests. The task of acculturation, on the subjective level, was almost entirely left to the various denominations of the Church.[36] The London Baptist Mission somehow lost government patronage in Assam, and could only enter the south Lushai hills which had been with Bengal at the beginning of administration. The Welsh Presbyterians were entrenched in the Khasi hills and the north Lushai hills. The American Baptists were allotted the Naga hills, the Brahmaputra valley and the Garo hills. The Catholics were, however, in the British days confined mainly to Shillong, and could enter deeper into the hills only after Independence. It appears that the governments of British India and of independent India, have both followed a discreet licensing policy in respect of the Church.

In 1947 the Bardoloi subcommittee noted 'considerable' but unequal progress in the hill areas, especially in respect of education. The 'most backward areas, comparatively', appeared to be the Mikir and the Garo hills (both partially excluded areas). 'The Khasi Hills have probably benefited by the fact that the capital of the Province is situated in them. In the Garo Hills,

Christian Missions have spread some education along with Christianity but the Mikir Hills had also suffered from the fact that they were divided between two districts, Nowgong and Sibsagar, and thus are nobody's child.' Among the excluded areas, the north Cachar hills were the most backward of all the hills. The frontier tracts, 'parts of which must be inhabited by people with no contact with civilization or education, were, of course, on a different footing. But, the condition of life and the pursuit of non-agricultural occupations cannot be said to have reached the level attained in the plains, although the degree of intelligence necessary is undoubtedly available in most of these areas.'

While government contribution to the material culture of the hill people was almost nil, it had definite reservations about their education, expressed as early as 1912–13:

> While elementary education cannot be too freely encouraged in the hills, the greatest care is required in the matter of secondary and collegiate education. It is most important that hill boys should not be betrayed into a course which will educate them out of satisfaction with such prospects as life in the hills affords or can be made to yield. We must have pioneers, but should not be eager for pioneers of discontent. Scholarships should be granted in ample number to allow of the training of the boys of the hill tribes to fill the Government offices and serve the state in all departments in the hills. They are being so granted, what more is required may be determined by the demand. We should not stand in the way of the people receiving what they are ready and able to *pay for*.[37]

Consequently, the hill people got only half an education. The subsidised mission schools throughout the British period were almost entirely of middle English standard. The primary objective of the missions was to train and employ good preachers. Their teaching was biased towards religion and literature. The general standard of knowledge remained quite low. The hill students, even today, are generally weak in mathematics, natural sciences and abstract philosophy.

Notes and References

1 Two years before the publication of *The Indian Mussalmans*, in 1870, W. W. Hunter applied the theory of *divide et impera* with reference to what he called the 'non-Aryan population' of India. In the 'Political Dissertations' prefixed to his *A Comparative Dictionary of Non-Aryan Languages*, London, 1868, Hunter stressed their incompatibility with the Aryan population and suggested the political use of the former. The government had to deny his charge of ill-treatment and Mackenzie had to prepare a *Memorandum* in 1869. (See Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 53.)

2 J. H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, London, 1921, p. 154.

3 A. S. Reid, *The Chin–Lushai Land*, London, 1893, p. 235.

4 N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, London, 1932, p. 13.

5 A. W. Davis (1898) quoted by Hutton, op. cit., p.161.

6 Reid, op. cit., p. 2.

7 Chie Nakane, *The Garo and the Khasi*, Paris, 1967, p. 97.

8 T. C. Hodson, *The Meitheis*, London, 1908, p. 11.

9 Fredrick Barth (ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries : The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, London, 1969, p. 11.

10 E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, p. 291.

11 Hamlet Bareh, *History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Shillong, 1967, p. 10.

12 Ibid., p. 16.

13 Hutton, op.cit., p. 10.

14 Ibid., p. 109.

15 S. E. Peal, 'The Nagas and the Neighbouring Tribes' in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1874*, vol. iii.

16 Anthony Gilchrist McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, London, 1949, p. 37.

17 Early British records also mention them as 'Shendoos'. See Reid, *History*, p. 1.

18 Gangnumei Kabui, 'Political Developments in the Hills Areas of Manipur', paper submitted to the Third Summer School on the Sociology of the North-Eastern Hill Areas, Kohima, 1970.

19 Gunnar Myrdal (*Asian Drama*, Pelican, 1968, vol. 1, p. 162) says, 'When a colony was valued mainly for its products and its supply of cheap labour ... a system of indirect rule was often the simplest method of gaining economic control of its resources at the lowest possible cost.'

20 The Calcutta Gazette, 2 March 1870, part 1.

21 *The Calcutta Gazette*, 1 November 1871, part 1. The authority of the

Governor-General to delegate rule making power to the Governor was challenged in the case of *Queen* v *Bura* (1879), Ind. Appeal 170 P.C., and the Privy Council held that the power did exist.

22 Hunter, op. cit., p. 14.

23 The Gazette of India, 18 April 1874, part 1.

24 E. A. Gait, *Manual of Local Rules and Orders Made under the Enactments Applying to Assam*, Calcutta, 1893, pp. 58–98.

25 Stephen Fuchs, *The Rebellious Prophets*, Bombay, 1966.

26 *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. XIII, 1907, p. 119.

27 Quoted by Edward T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872, p. 110.

28 Hinduism in eastern India has suffered from two problems, namely, the caste status of converts and the Sakta–Vaishnava conflict.

29 *Report of the Census of Assam, 1881*, chapter V, paragraph 112.

30 B. K. Roy-Burman, 'Integrated Area Approach to the Problems of the Hill Tribes of North-East India', paper contributed to the seminar on the Tribal Situation in India at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1969. The 1961 census showed 41 per cent of the hill people of Assam as Christian.

31 P. Moasosang, 'The Naga Search for Self-Identity' in Rathin Mitra and Barun Dasgupta (eds.), *A Common Perspective for North-East India*, Calcutta, 1967.

32 Hutton, op. cit., pp. 140–41, emphasis added.

33 David Roy, a Khasi civilian, in Keith Cantlie's *The Khasi Law*, Shillong, 1931, illustrated how communal land in Khasi states was grabbed by influential people and added:

> In the old days for an ordinary homestead not much land was required and for cultivation purposes land not more than could be cultivated by a single person or family would be taken up ... [Now] Raid land is converted into private possession similar to Ri Kyntis (p. 121).

In the British portion, Cantlie noted that 'Permanent cultivation... remains with the holders who inheritand dispose of it as they wish; so with groves in the War country (in the southern foothills).'

34 Chie Nakane, *Garo and Khasi*, Paris, 1967, p. 65.

35 Cantlie, op. cit., pp. 24–25.

36 Parry (op. cit., p. 19) wrote, 'A more active instrument of change than government is the Christian Mission.'

37 Government of Assam, Director of Public Instruction, *Report on Public Instruction in Assam for the year 1912–13*, Shillong.

CHAPTER 3

The Fourth Dimension of Culture

The earliest description of the impact of British rule on the north-eastern hills is found in a report of A. J. M. Mills on the Khasi hills (1853). According to him:

> [the Khasias] from an association with civilization and wealth have become arrogant, deceitful and untrustworthy; but however their moral character may have deteriorated, the advantages they have derived and are deriving from their connexion with our Government is great, and numerous civil wars, which continuously distracted the country, have been put down. Their trade has been augmented. There is an increasing demand for their produces, and there is a striking improvement in the condition of the people, to say nothing of the benefits which they have derived from the attempt, feeble though it has been, to diffuse amongst them the advantages of education. We have also reaped the benefits of our position in having obtained an entire cessation of the murderous inroads which these mountaineers constantly made into the plains.[1]

In 1929 J. B. Fuller took satisfaction from the fact that, 'By promptitude of action and steady pressure, peace was gradually established in an area that was considerably larger than that originally annexed. Men, who had been accustomed to decorate their houses with skulls, felt almost content in using pumpkins for this purpose.'[2] But the Simon Commission reported that 'the great majority of the tribes are far from forgetting their warlike past with the long records of raids upon the plains. Many of them probably regard the *Pax Britannica* as a passing inconvenience. The confidence of the plainsmen evidenced by the continual immigration and breaking up of virgin soil is equally a recent feature—peace in the frontier districts is immediately dependent on the five battalions of Assam Rifles.'[3] In 1932 N. E. Parry, in a book recommended by Hutton as 'a record of an Assam hill

tribe taken before annexation and administration have had time to modify its primitive customs and mode of life,'[4] showed the contrast between the unadministered and administered areas. The former were more 'hardworking and energetic' than the latter on whom the government and the missions had 'more effect by no means with entirely good results.'[5] About the time of the transfer of power, Major McCall admitted the point partly when he declared that a primary objective of his book was to show 'what happens when a backward people are exposed, undirected, to stronger culture impacts.'[6]

The Christian Church in the Hills

To set the record straight, it is necessary to assert that it was not the Church which entered the hills first. The first to enter the difficult terrains was administration. After the smoothening of the surface by administration, the Church went into action and sowed the seeds of progress. A history of the Christian missions in northeastern India will vindicate this statement.

Dealing with the beginning of missionary activities in this country, Thompson and Garrat pointed out that the European community in India 'bitterly opposed the early missionaries, like Carey, partly because they came from the poorer classes, but chiefly because they might have a disturbing effect on Indians.'[7] The Vellore Mutiny of 1807–08 strengthened the scepticism of the East India Company, interested more in peaceful trade with the Indians, than in 'civilisation' or Christianisation. But in 1812 a Bengali convert, Krishna Chandra Paul, came from the Serampore Baptist Mission to Bholagunj in Sylhet district and contacted some Khasis there.[8] He is reported to have converted two Khasis during his short stay.

In 1813 there was a change in the general situation. First, the Charter Act of 1813 laid it down as a duty of the administration to introduce 'useful knowledge' and help religious and moral improvement, reduce the powers and role of the East India Company, and increase the control of the British Parliament over Indian administration. Secondly, an energetic British officer David Scott was appointed judge and magistrate of Rangpur, the northeastern district of Bengal. He was seriously interested in

spreading Christianity in this border region, especially among the hill people, and himself distributed the Bengali translation of the New Testament, mostly among the plains Garos.

It is important to note that in nineteenth century Bengal, Christianity came as an overwhelming intellectual movement, while in the eastern hills it came through administrative policy. Mackenzie has quoted an interesting correspondence between Scott and W. B. Bayley, secretary to the government. On 27 April 1825, Scott reported his efforts to obtain the services of 'one or more Missionaries of the sort suited to convert the Garos:'

> I am satisfied that nothing permanently good can be obtained by other means, and that if we do not interfere on behalf of the poor Garos they will soon become Hindus or half-Hindus, retaining and acquiring many of the bad parts of both their present and improved creed. I would greatly prefer two or more Moravian Missionaries of the old school who along with religion would teach the useful arts. If Government would ensure them subsistence only in the case of success or my death, I would willingly take upon myself the expense in the first instance, and 300 per annum would suffice. Of success, I have no more doubt than that, if allowed, you could make Christians of the Hindu boys: and the great error of the Missionaries appears to me to be that of directing their attention to polished natives instead of rude tribes who are still in that state of national childhood which enables the stranger priest to enact the school-master and to teach them what he likes.

To this the secretary replied demi-officially, with general approval, 'The Government could not, however, give a salary to the people who might be employed in their capacity of Missionaries, but they might call them school-master, and give assistance in that shape.'[9] In fact, Scott's proposal was supported by Governor-General Amherst. But the Supreme Government reproachfully reminded the latter that, 'we would not engage in schemes for attempting to propagate Christianity among the natives.'[10] Subsequently, a school was established for the plains Garos of Goalpara. The first mention of a financial grant to this Garo mission (or, for that matter, any Christian mission in Assam) is found in 1829.[11] It came in the name of the 'teachers' of the school. Yet in those early years the administration was not very

enthusiastic about encouraging missionary activities. The absence of patronage to the Anglican Church in the Assam hills might be attributed to the British government's reluctance towards direct involvement in the complex situation in this region.

In 1833, a fillip was given to the missions with the total abolition of the East India Company's powers. That year, an American Christian missionary named Alexander Lish from the Serampore Baptist Mission came to Cherrapunji and opened a school. Lish was the author of the first Khasi book in Bengali script—a Khasi grammar. The mission also took down some non-Christian Khasis to Serampore to impart to them English and Bengali education.[12] In 1836 the American Baptist Mission reached Sadiya at the invitation of Major Jenkins, the commissioner of Assam,[13] and opened a school there.

A study of the Church–State relations in the context of the Assam hills may be profitable, though beyond the scope of this work. It would be interesting, for example, to know the reasons for the departure of the Serampore Baptist Mission in 1838 and the stationing of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission in its place in 1841. It may be mentioned here that whereas the Serampore Baptist Mission gave the Khasi the Bengali script and showed less interest in proselytising than in educating them, the Welsh Presbyterian Mission introduced the Roman script and displayed a greater enthusiasm for the cause of proselytisation. The American Baptists also had an equal zeal for proselytisation, though they encouraged the Assamese language and script. Their success in proselytisation, however, came late. Referring to their work among the Naga, Butler wrote in 1847:

> Amongst a people so thoroughly primitive and so inde pendent of religious prepossessiveness we might reasonably expect missionary zeal would be successful; for the last eight years, however, two or three American Baptist Missionaries have in vain endeavoured to awaken in them a sense of the saving virtues of Christianity.[14]

Government assistance was still lukewarm—only Rs 100 a month. The school at Sadiya was closed in 1852 after its headmaster, Rev. M. Bronson, had shifted to Sibsagar.[15] The American Baptist Mission remained confined to the Brahmaputra

valley, espousing the cause of the Assamese language, and entered the Naga hills only after 1876 when the hills had come under some kind of administration. As late as 1891, A. W. Davis wrote in the census report that the Naga and the Kuki were not inclined towards Christianity. The Angami were reluctant to accept it.[16] The first Christian mission to be set up in Manipur (Naga area) was the American Baptist in 1894, three years after the administration of Manipur was taken over by the British. In 1886 administration entered the Garo hills which became a district. The American Baptist Mission followed in 1867[17] and its headquarters were shifted to Tura. In the Lushai hills too Christianity entered close upon the heels of administration in the 1890s. The southern part initially being tagged with the province of Bengal and the London Baptists already being entrenched there, the northern hills came under the influence of the American Baptist Mission. In 1914 the Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission was admitted into the Kuki area of Manipur. It later spread over north Cachar and parts of the Mizo hills. The first Catholic mission in the hills was German. It came towards the end of the nineteenth century, was confined to Shillong, and during the First World War was replaced by an Italian mission. The area of operation remained unchanged. In the 1930s, the Catholic mission got entry into the Garo hills chiefly through the patronage of the Catholic Governor, Michael Keane.[18] It has been growing in the Mizo and Naga hills only since Independence. Interestingly, the existence of the Church of England in the hills is notional. Till Independence, administration did not enter the frontier tracts beyond the Inner Line; hence there was no Christian mission in those hills.

Operating under special and difficult circumstances, the Church, Protestant as well as Catholic, had to make several compromises with local habits. It was always ill at ease over the drinking habits of the people. At least one major aberration was reported from the Mizo hills, after the end of the last century— and that was a revivalist movement with 'hysterical' symptoms among the Lushai converts. Such a revivalist tendency, according to Stephen Fuchs, developed out of Lushai emotionalism, inferiority complex and exhibitionism. 'Moreover, revivalism is a recurring phenomenon distinctive of the Welsh form of Presbyterianism.' Certain members, usually women,

of the congregation would suddenly feel possessed and start uttering prophecies. 'It is reported that in some cases of these excessive emotional outbursts sexual liberties were taken.'[19] The government used an iron hand in suppressing such outbursts, which for a time created a law-and-order problem.

Factors of Change

There is little evidence to the credit of either the administration or the Church, that the material culture of the people changed much, except on the surface. The amenities of modern living did indeed reach them, but the means of production remained virtually unchanged.[20] No attempt was made in the British period towards industrialisation of the hills. A limited achievement took place in respect of agriculture. The British administrators, since the days of David Scott, tried to promote potato cultivation with some success. Plantation of pine trees was also more or less successful. But even potato cultivation was based on jhuming. An attempt to encourage terracing in the hills outside the Angami country yielded results only in the Khasi hills and that too on a limited scale. Wet rice cultivation was long known in the Jaintia area of the Khasi hills, which may partly explain the limited success of the programme.

The various rules for administration of justice, issued to the districts from time to time, tried to maintain indigenous social institutions while imposing British territorial authority in a more or less uniform way. The application of the rules inevitably created some formalised stereotypes for the administration of the hills, which affected the stability if not the equilibrium of the hill societies traditionally based on unwritten customs. The administration was frequently confronted with peculiar situations arising out of conflicting purposes. Thus, as already seen, the Khasi siems were turned into some sort of 'princes' in relation to the people, but reduced to petty feudatories under the British government.[21] On the other hand, McCall, the superintendent of the Lushai hills, listed the traditional rights of the chiefs that were 'arbitrarily extinguished' in the districts:

a. Right to order capital punishment.
b. Right to seize food, stores and property of villagers who wished to transfer their allegiance.
c. Proprietary rights over land arbitrarily reserved by the government in the interests of the public living in the neighbouring areas in British India.
d. Right to tax traders doing business within the jurisdiction of the chiefs.
e. Right to freedom of action in relation to making their sons chiefs under their own jurisdiction.
f. Right to help those *bawis* (slaves) who constituted the means whereby the chiefs could cultivate and acquire the ability to sustain their villages in peace and war.
g. Right to attach the property of the villagers when they wished or deemed fit.[22]

Yet the rules for the Lushai hills were supposed to be based on the principle of least interference compared with those for the other hills, including the Naga hills.[23] The original draft of the rules had been prepared by A. Porteous, Political Officer of the north Lushai hills during 1894–97, on the model of the rules for the Naga hills which, according to McCabe, a veteran officer in charge of the Naga hills, had been found 'practically unworkable', being too elaborate. The rules for the Lushai hills were really drafted by McCabe himself.[24] About these rules Reid, who was the Governor of Assam for a part of the period during which McCall was superintendent of the Lushai hills, writes, 'one of the main principles of these Rules is the internal control of villages by their own leaders.'[25]

On the other hand, about the effect of the rules on the Angami Nagas, Hutton wrote:

> The annexation of the Angami country has probably affected but little the internal arrangements of villages or their own ordering and governance. The *Pehuma*s or chiefs, such as they were, seem to have had very little more authority than the "Gaonburas" nowadays appointed by Government, and that is saying very little. There occurred in some villages cases of the chieftainship passing on by inheritance... It is most unlikely, however, that the hereditary nature of such chieftainships depended on anything more than the influence, wealth, and intelligence of the chief's

son enabling him to retain the position afforded him by that of his father. At best the chief's position probably gave him no power except on the war-path.[26]

A social and cultural dislocation was indeed caused by Christianity so far as the chiefs were concerned. The chiefs' position was connected with indigenous customary rites. The temporal powers in a traditional society were linked with this position. The conversion of a chief would automatically lead to the loss of this ritualistic privilege, and where the chiefs were endowed with real temporal power, a great resistance to Christianity could naturally be expected. Of course, when a chief embraced Christianity, the bulk of the community would usually follow suit. But the converse was not always true. In any case, before being converted the chiefs would certainly weigh the prospects for gains and losses, which implied some concomitant responsibilities. Thus in the Lushai hills, where Christianity has achieved the highest record of success in India, the chiefs, according to McCall, 'being, on the Lushai standards, comparatively rich, were less ready to give up their standards, their *Zu* (rice beer), and their sacrifices.' The main mission 'impact fell upon the ordinary people'.[27]

This may also account for the belated success of Christianity in the Naga hills. Among the eastern Nagas, particularly the Konyaks, who were under the greatest amount of authoritarianism, resistance to Christianity was considerable. The Khasi did not embrace the new faith until the beginning of this century. Even today three siemships are non-Christian. Traditional religious rites are so strongly attached to the Khyrim siemship that the incumbent cannot afford to change his faith, even though most of his close relatives might have done so.[28] In the Garo hills, many *nokmas* (chiefs) are still non-Christian. Robbins Burling writes that when a nokma adopts Christianity, nokmaship should pass on to another, but the government continues to recognise the former.[29] This creates dislocation in the traditional system, but not necessarily on the social plane for usually a wealthy non-Christian takes over the ritual responsibilities of the nokma. Thus a distinction develops between *aking-nokma* (nokma of the village land) and *nokma-ganna* (nokma for religious purposes).[30]

Crisis of the 'Community'

An example of the chiefs' dilemma in the modified 'tribal' societies can be furnished from the Khasi hills. As early as 1874, Colonel Bivar, deputy commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia district and Political Officer to the Khasi states, was confronted with a boundary dispute between the siems of Mawsynram and Maharam. The inhabitants of the disputed villages owed allegiance to the latter and therefore the villages were awarded to him, taking some natural features as the boundary. The uncultivated lands between the two territories were not settled. Keith Cantlie, the eminent commentator on Khasi law, noted in 1934 that, 'This has been the general method followed since that time. No settlement of boundaries has been made unless a dispute arose and no final settlement of boundaries of all States in one operation has been attempted.'[31] But Bivar laid down an important principle about the jurisdiction of siemships:

> As the Khasi Chiefs are not territorial sovereigns but democratic Chiefs, whose authority is over the subjects and not over the lands, properly speaking they cannot assert territorial limits, but their jurisdiction extends over villages and the boundaries of such localities constitute the confines of their respective rule.[32]

The problem, however, remained with those Khasis who shifted from one village to another but refused to pledge allegiance to the chief of the latter. With the growth of the town of Shillong, a large exodus to the provincial capital led to a virtual challenge to the authority of the siem of Mylliem on whose land it was built.[33] Much litigation followed from the confusion. In 1923 the first session of the Khasi National Durbar, held at Shillong, was seized of the problem of the 'misconduct' of the Khasi settlers in the states. The immigrants, it was reported, had stopped paying tributes to the state authorities and had refused to obey the judicial orders of the state courts. The durbar declared that, under Khasi usages, the grant of the citizenship of a state was subject to birthright, legitimacy of parentage, marriage and liability to inheritance. No Khasi settler could be a qualified citizen unless he placed himself under the protection of the state to which he came to reside.[34] Colonel Bivar's postulate was evidently under strain.

A somewhat different result of the substitution of clan rights by territorial authority was reported in 1921 by J. H. Hutton, deputy commissioner of the Naga district. 'In some villages, perhaps most villages, the different clans dwell normally in peace and unity together, but this is probably much more the case under British rule than it was aforetime.'[35] Such metamorphoses resulted from the imposition of the rules for administration of justice which vested the village chiefs and headmen with judicial authority. The application of the rules at the same time created some formal stereotypes for the administration of the hills, which affected the traditional set-up of the hill societies so long based on unwritten customs. Though the Codes of Civil and Criminal Procedure were not applied initially, the spirit of the Indian Penal Code was always followed. Thus, a Naga could no longer avenge one death by another. While violence was considerably checked, public resentment grew.

Another cause of resentment was the automatic vesting of the title of the village lands in the government. Though the government imposed only a house tax and, except for the permanently cultivated lands in the hills, no land revenue, the hill people did not like paying even this meagre token of loyalty. As no land settlement took place in the hills,[36] the extent of the government's authority was not precise. William Hunter, in the *Imperial Gazetteer* (second edition), asserted that in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, land was the absolute property of the cultivators. The Assam Land Revenue Manual was categorical that the government did not recognise any such rights.[37]

Such imbalances were also reflected in the domain of personal law. 'At the advent of Christianity in the Hills, a convert was considered a "sang" (taboo) and lost all claim to property', wrote Cantlie on the Khasi hills. With the growth of the number of Christians and the application of the Freedom of Religion Act of 1850 in the hills, the disabilities were removed. But Section 88 of the Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872, applied in the eastern hills, prohibited all marriages contrary to the converts' personal laws. Thus, Christians 'observe strictly the rule of exogamy',[38] but challenged the customary law of inheritance.

It has already been noted that property in the hills was fast becoming 'private', but it was still a long way off from being 'personal'.[39] Cantlie noted a tendency among the Christian

Khasis 'to regard *Ka Khaddu* (the youngest daughter) as having the unrestricted rights of heir under other systems of law,'[40] though her traditional status in Khasi law is that of the manager of property, subject to the advice of the clan elders.

In 1914 Christian Jaintias demanded that as their males lived with their wives, contrary to the traditional practice of husbands living with their own mothers and 'visiting' their wives at night, only the self-earned property of the husband should go to the wife. In 1918, the government decided that as the 'mode of life' of a Christian Jaintia had changed, the courts should be free to let the wife of a Christian Jaintia inherit the property of the husband earned by them jointly, provided that the wife remained a widow.[41] Cantlie noted that the courts had been trying to induce settlements 'in the family'.[42]

The situation was more or less similar in the other hills, with the result that personal laws in all the hills have remained uncodified.

Caesar, God and Education

It was in accordance with the administration's aversion to considerable involvement in the hills that education in the hills was almost entirely left to the Church,[43] though subsidised by the government. The Government High School in Shillong was, however, the first high school to be set up in the hills, for the missions did not seem to be favourably inclined to set up any high school. Their main objective in setting up middle standard schools was to train preachers. The Shillong Government High School was started in the 1870s because of the perseverence of Babu Jeebon Roy, a non-Christian Khasi and retired civilian, who donated Rs 700 towards its initial expenses. His first son, Sib Charan Roy, was the first student to pass the Entrance Examination from the school in 1880. Only then the mission at Shillong founded another high school. Soon the two schools were integrated, the headmaster of the mission school becoming also the head of the government school.[44]

In 1878 the government made over education in the Garo hills to the Garo mission, which moved from Goalpara to Tura in November the same year. While the mission was to spend

at least Rs 1000 on education, the annual grant-in-aid stood at Rs 3000.[45] After 1910, the government tried to take over the management of the mission schools.[46] But the process of transfer was stopped due to shortage of funds, and missionary control over the schools remained as before. In 1934 the Garo Baptist Sobha opened a high school at Tura, which was taken over by the government in 1938.

McCall recorded that chiefly due to missionary efforts the rate of literacy in the Lushai hills reached 12.9 per cent in 1931, and 19.3 per cent in 1941. 'The cost incurred by the Government on the education of the Lushai has never exceeded three half-pence per head of population per year, within the first forty years of British administration. In the latter part of this period seven hundred pounds sterling have been spent yearly on 150,000 people.'[47] In 1944 the first high school in the Lushai hills was founded at Aijal. Initially, except among the Ao, education was not well received in the Naga hills. The district recorded a literacy of only 2.2 per cent in 1931.[48] The first high school in the Naga hills was founded in 1938 at Kohima.

One consequence of the excessive reliance of the government on the Church as an agency of education and other social services was the growth of the vested interests of the Church. The Church was not only the religious and cultural agency in the remotest part of a district but also an employer of the educated people who took to teaching and preaching as a 'black-coated' occupation. For a talented young man, the favour of the Church could mean financial assistance to enable him to reach the threshold of higher education in the plains. The Church thus became a centre of power and patronage in the hill districts. Referring to the Lushai hills McCall wrote, 'Local educational practice soon gave rise to the belief that education and Christianity were the passport to "salaried job", relief from the wearisome toil of cultivating a hard land. Education has constituted a means to a dead end, the salaried post.'[49] He adds that 'Black-coated occupations became synonymous with progress. Christianity led towards black-coatism.'[50] The result was the creation of an 'oligarchy, privileged, salaried, and therefore, materially powerful, most of the members of which are on the mission's pay-roll, are Church-Executives, or in the employ of Government, in which case they are probably, in any case, subject, spiritually, to the Lushai

Church.'[51] Christianity and the oligarchy, according to McCall, bred individualism, flourishing in the headquarters towns and 'naturally imbued with the thrill of seeking independence of the chiefs and freedom from customary communal discipline,'[52] which the British administration had always tried to retain, in its own interest.

In one respect Church education left a dangerous legacy. Except for the London Baptist Mission for some time, the missions carried out a uniform policy of imparting the Roman script to the hill dialects, which were indeed immensely enriched but permanently alienated from the contiguous plains languages from which many hill dialects had drawn heavily. Thus the Khasi and the Garo are in the process of forgetting Bengali, just as the Naga are estranged from Assamese, in spite of the fact that the *lingua franca* of the Naga even today is a broken form of Assamese and some old people in the Khasi and Garo hills can still speak Bengali, just as the border Lushais can.

The dynamics of any society cannot possibly be understood without a reference to the tensions that are generated through its mobility. British incursion certainly made the mobility of the hill society faster than ever. But while it was the policy of the administration to disturb the social equilibrium as little as possible, the challenge posed by the Church went much deeper and upset the traditional power relations. Resistance to such a challenge was natural. However, what is important to note is that the leaders of the resistance were the allies of the government – the chiefs and officials, the erstwhile champions of vested interest.

It would be a mistake to assume that opposition to the Church meant opposition to *all* kinds of progress. The opposition was against the challenge that the Church was posing to the structure of authority. In the Khasi hills, the leadership of the resistance was assumed by Babu Jeebon Roy, member of a Dkhar clan (originating from a non-Khasi), son of a trader at Cherrapunji and the first self-educated hill person to have become an extra-assistant commissioner by virtue of which he became the biggest landowner in the district. Roy helped the authorities to acquire land in Shillong, the future capital of the province. He unsuccessfully tried his hand at business, never accepted Christianity, was an avowed enemy of the Welsh

Presbyterian Church, advocated the patronisation of a Brahmo primary school at Shillong, and almost single-handedly caused the establishment of a government high school at Shillong—the first high school to be founded in the hill districts and to remain free from missionary control for some years. In 1893 he founded the *Seng Khasi* (Khasi Association), a revivalist, anti-Christian organisation which earned the blessings of some of the powerful siems in the Khasi hills. He is also reported to have been in contact with W. C. Bonnerjee, a Congress leader of Bengal.

Referring to 'a hill district' (but implying the Lushai hills), the Government of Assam reported to the Indian Statutory Commission that the area had been peaceful, since the surrender of the chiefs, until 1911 when 'the attempt of a missionary to undermine the authority of the chiefs in a matter which is considered uncivilised led to apprehensions of disturbances' as a result of which the missionary had to be expelled from the district.[53]

There are many instances to show that, though the administration and the Church were functioning in the hills with the same objective, namely the consolidation of British rule, the results of their operations were not complementary in all respects. The strategy of the administration was least interference with the existing order, while the activities of the Church tended to undermine its foundation, by providing the new elite with intellectual ammunition.[54] The inevitable result was a social imbalance, which not only lingered but also became aggravated after Independence.

Notes and References

1 A. J. M. Mills, *Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills*, reprint, Shillong, 1901, pp. 5–6.
2 'Introduction' by Fuller to L. W. Shakespear, *History of the Assam Rifles*, London, 1928, p. vii.
3 *Report of Indian Statutory Commission*, (Simon Commission Report) 1930, vol. 1, p. 76.
4 'Introduction' to N.E. Parry's *The Lakhers*, London, 1932.
5 Parry, op. cit., p. 14.
6 Anthony Gilchrist McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, London, 1949, p. 7.

7 E. J. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *The Rise and Fulfilment of the British Rule in India*, Allahabad, 1962, p. 192.

8 Hamlet Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Shillong, 1967, p. 396.

9 Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hills Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, pp. 253–54.

10 See H. K. Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes, North-East Frontier, 1822–1842*, vol. I, p. 67.

11 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 92.

12 Bareh, op. cit., p. 397. Also H. R. Diengdoh's letter dated 24 September 1902 to the Editor, *Bengalee*, Calcutta, vide U *Khasi Mynta*, *Risaw*, 1902, Shillong.

13 Major Jenkins, in a letter dated 10 March 1835, invited the Baptist Mission to Assam from where it could operate all over the north and west of China, as desired by the mission. Jenkins also promised Rs 1000 for the first printing press that might be opened in Assam by the mission, besides Rs 1000 towards the expenses for their establishment (vide Dana M. Albaugh, *Between Two Centuries: A Study of Four Baptist Mission Fields—Assam, South India, Bengal–Orissa and South China*, New York, 1935, pp. 49–50). About Bronson, the missionary who went to the Naga village of Namsang (now in the Tirap district of Arunachal), Jenkins wrote:

> I conceive, by a cooperation with that gentleman we may hope long to see the civilization greatly advanced among the Nagas and our supremacy gradually extended over the hills.
>
> Bronson was granted a sum of Rs 100 per mensem for 'the objects of practical utility' (vide Barpujari, op. cit., p. 186). Later this mission initiated the movement for the introduction of Assamese as the court language in the Brahmaputra valley. The demand was accepted by the government only in 1872.

14 J. Butler, *A Sketch of Assam*, London, 1847, pp. 149–50. Another reason for the shifting of the mission was the murder of Rev. Nathan Brown by the local people on 28 January 1839.

15 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 92.

16 A. W. Davis in *Census of India, 1891, Assam*, vol. I, quoted in *Census of India*, vol. 1, part V-A, p. 78.

17 Rev. B. J. Anderson (C.B.C.A. Field Secretary), *A Brief Statement About Baptist Work in Assam*, Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, n.d.

18 'There are still districts of Hill Tribes in Assam where Catholic missionaries are not allowed, though we have been requested

by these hill tribes people to go and work amongst them. Hindu missionary societies are favoured and helped to take over the work of the Christian missionaries working with their spirit. Of course, we must be prudent and bide our time seeking to help Government all we can, and hoping that by showing our loyalty and good works the barriers will fall.' (*Report of the Meeting of the Working and Standing Committees of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India*, Bangalore, 1952, Vigilance Section.)

19 Stephen Fuchs, The *Rebellious Prophets*, Bombay, 1966, p. 92.

20 NCAER, *Techno-Economic Survey of Nagaland* (Delhi, 1968, p. 13) noted that the Nagas' only instrument was the chopper.

21 Keith Cantlie, *Notes on Khasi Law*, Shillong, 1934, p. 179.

22 McCall, op. cit., p. 202.

23 Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883–1941*, Shillong, 1942, p. 41.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 43.

26 J. H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, London, 1921, p. 142.

27 McCall, op.cit., p. 208.

28 In the religious ceremonies of the Khyrim, in which the *siems*' youngest sister acts as the chief priestess, Christians are not permitted to take part.

29 Robbins Burling, *Rengsanggri*, Philadelphia, 1963, p. 67.

30 Nakane, op. cit., p. 62.

31 Cantlie, op. cit., Shillong, 1934, p. 131.

32 Quoted in ibid.

33 Ibid., p. 132.

34 Bareh, op. cit., pp. 231–32. In 1925 the Khasi National Durbar laid down that the settlers in a Khasi state must submit to the judicial authority of the state's chief. See Cantlie, op. cit., p. 163.

35 Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, p. 109.

36 The district councils have adopted the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886 for the purpose of the settled lands within the hill districts. Under the system there is no permanent land settlement. Land can be allotted on *patta* (lease) for 15 years. See J. N. Das, *An Introduction to the Land-Laws of Assam*, Gauhati, 1968, p. 17.

37 *Assam Land Revenue Manual*, Shillong, 1906, p. clvi, said, 'There is no authority for the statement made at page 177, Vol. VIII of Hunter's *Imperial Gazetteer*, 2nd Edition, that all lands in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are the absolute property of the cultivators. The Government has never recognised any such right except in the semi-independent states of the Khasi Hills.'

38 Cantlie, op. cit., p. 57.
39 Ibid., p. 76.
40 Ibid., p. 29.
41 Ibid., pp. 33–40.
42 Ibid., pp. 24–25.
43 Parry (op.cit., p. 19) wrote, 'A more active instrument of change than Government is the Christian Mission.'
44 *U Khasi Mynta* (old Khasi monthly), Shillong, 1902, *Risaw* (July).
45 M. Sangma, 'A Short History of Education in the Garo Hills', *The Assam Tribune*, 3 May 1970.
46 *Report of the Progress of Education in Assam*, 1912–13 to 1916–17 and 1917–18 to 1921–22 by the Director of Public Instruction, Assam, Shillong. Also see the *Memoranda* of the Assam government to the Indian Statutory Commission, p. 109; M. Alemchiba, *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, Kohima, 1970, pp. 158–59.
47 McCall, op. cit., p. 203.
48 Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, Shillong, 1961, p. 71.
49 McCall, op. cit., p. 205.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 217.
52 Ibid.
53 *Memoranda* of the Assam government, p. 106. The dispute had arisen because the missionary's championing of the cause of the slaves infuriated the chiefs. See *Proceedings of the Hon'ble Chief Commissioner of Assam During April 1914, Political*, Shillong, 1914.
54 See for instance, Nakane, op. cit., pp. 64–65. Cantlie noted in 1934 that, 'with the spread of education there is less disposition to obey without question the order of Chiefs and Durbars' (p. 147).

CHAPTER 4

Genesis of Hill Politics

The solidarity movement started in the most advanced part of the hills, the Jaintia, with the establishment in 1900 of the Jaintia Durbar as a sociocultural organisation. Politics came in the wake of the Montford Reforms inseparably with social movements. In 1923 Rev. James Joy Mohan Nichols-Roy (a Khasi pastor belonging to the Church of God and wealthy orange planter who had graduated from Calcutta) married an American lady, travelled widely, and took the initiative of establishing the Khasi National Durbar, and becoming its founder secretary. The durbar consisted of the siems and other aristocrats. In 1925 it codified some of the Khasi customary land-laws. Nichols-Roy reportedly also tried to modify the succession rules in order to provide for male succession. The attempt, if it had been made, failed due to opposition from the traditionalists. In 1927 Nichols-Roy became a minister in the Assam government,[1] and gave up the secretaryship of the durbar in favour of a personal follower, Joab Solomon.

In 1928, with the appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission and the Indian States Commission, full-scale political activity started in the Khasi hills. On 9 March 1928, the durbar headed by the siem of Khyrim decided against submitting any memorandum to the Statutory (Simon) Commission, as the proper authority to receive any representation from the Khasi states was the States Commission[2] which was not visiting the Khasi hills.

Problems of Reform

But Joab Solomon, along with two other Khasi gentlemen, Rai Saheb Hormu Rai Diengdoh and Rai Mohan Diengdoh, made a representation to the Statutory Commission in which Solomon signed as the secretary, Khasi National Durbar. The

memorandum complained against the system of issuing sanads since 1859, which had put the siems under complete subjection to the authority of the deputy commissioner, enabled the local government to grab the land of the Khasi and entitled a chief to make profit out of the lease, sale or other disposal of the minerals of the Khasi hills. 'This right he never had by any Khasi law or custom.' The memorandum demanded: (1) 'that the clauses added to the sanads after1858 to the detriment of the peoples should now be rescinded and their ancient rights restored' and (2) 'that at the same time a central Durbar should be established as a federation of all the states.' It further suggested that the Khasi National Durbar 'which is now in its formative stage may be legalised and made representative as much as possible'. The statement carried a draft constitution for the durbar, which was to consist of the chiefs and other elected and nominated members, and would have the power: '(a) to make laws which shall be subject to the assent of the Governor of Assam, (b) to levy taxes for the improvement of the states, and (c) to frame rules for the conduct of its own meetings and the meeting of the Executive Council.'[3]

The reaction was immediate. Another representation, signed by Babu Sib Charan Roy (a 'landlord' of Mawkhar) and others was sent to the Statutory Commission denouncing the representative character of Solomon's memorandum.[4] A Khasi – Jaintia Young Men's Association sponsored a public meeting on 22 December 1928 at the Seng Khasi Hall to hear Solomon on his memorandum. At the stormy meeting presided over by Sib Charan Roy, MacDonald Khar-Kongor, another landowner and *mukhteer* (criminal lawyer), declared that:

> The practice recently innovated of leasing out communal lands by Siem was only possible through the usurpation of the constitutional rights of the people, which the previous British authorities had most emphatically disallowed, but the present political officers seemed to be labouring under a misconception that the Siems were Zamindars or landlords.[5]

A resolution passed at the meeting denied the existence of any valid right of the chiefs in land, implying the futility of revising the rights of chiefs. The demand for a central durbar for all the

states was turned down by another resolution, as 'it is only the duly convened Durbars, in which every adult male attending thereat is an eligible member, that have authority and whose decision or resolution is binding.' The meeting also demanded that 'whenever the British Courts in the Khasi Hills exercise original jurisdiction in civil or criminal matters whether from the British or non-British areas of those Hills, their decision should be subjected to the appellate jurisdiction of the Calcutta High Court.' This final demand arose out of an extreme resentment against the way the British officers tried the disputes. Solomon's memorandum did not of course voice any criticism against it, but wanted a 'supreme court of appeal' from the state durbar.[6]

Khar-Kongor was opposed to Solomon not because 'In the Memorandum a proposal had been made that there should be a Federation of the Khasi States,' but because the authors of the memorandum wanted that 'the present body constituting the Khasi National Durbar be legalised'. The Khasi National Durbar 'as at present composed' was too young and 'still far from being a representative body.'[7] The difference thus centred on the question whether democracy would mean, in Khasi society, the creation of a centralised organisation like the durbar where the new oligarchy – the followers of Nichols-Roy – were in considerable strength, or maintenance of the islands of autonomy that were the siemships. Interpretation of 'democracy' and 'social custom' is flexible. Chiefship in eastern India is an institution that constantly oscillates between authority and democracy, power and popularity, and corruption and benevolence, unless an extraneous force keeps it in proper balance.

Another aspect to the 'reforms' controversy was the conflict in attitudes towards the judicial system. The 'traditionalists' in the hills had long been complaining about the officials' lack of understanding of their customary laws. As late as 1939, Jobang D. Marak, a Garo MLA, protested that 'some Deputy Commissioners disdain some of their customs on account of which some innocent persons suffered extremely severe punishments.'[8] The second memorandum, submitted with the siems' blessings, therefore demanded the appellate jurisdiction of the High Court of Calcutta, stressing that 'while the Khasi may not at present need any reform in respect of self-determination, they stand in real need of a reform of the British Courts here.'[9]

Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy's note to the commission was somewhat different. He wrote:

> Every community in India, now wants to preserve itself. But this preservation should not be at the expense of progress... Small communities should have a certain amount of protection. Therefore, I think that the Khasi and Jaintia Hills may have a constituency like the Shillong constituency. The capital now is non-regulated and it is not under the High Court. The same may be done with Khasi and Jaintia Hills (British portion). It will have its own representatives in the Council, but owing to the necessity of preserving the village organisation existing at present and of protecting the rights of the people, it may remain non-regulated. Any law passed by the Legislative Council may be extended only by the power of the Governor.

But Nichols-Roy, the only hill person in the government, had no suggestion to offer regarding the other hills, nor any criticism against the government's proposal to exclude them. He did not make any suggestion regarding the Khasi states nor did he oppose the existing judicial system in the British villages and in Shillong.[10]

The proposal for constitutional reforms with which the Indian Statutory Commission was touring the country produced a complex reaction among the Jaintias whose shackles of isolation had been broken even before the British incursion. The Jaintia Durbar, led by Rev. L. Gatpoh, another pastor of the Church of England, in a memorandum to the commission on 14 May 1928 demanded their inclusion in the scheme of reforms and protested against their conversion into a 'frontier tribe', which would retard their progress and deprive them of their rights. When the Governor of Assam visited Jowai, the sub-divisional headquarters, on 9 November 1928, an address on behalf of the people of Jowai repeated the earlier demand, stressing that as hill people the Khasis were 'a peculiar people'. In the course of the eulogies usual on such occasions, the Governor called them a 'distinguished people', but suggested that they ran some risk by throwing in their lot with the people of the Assam valley. The Governor felt that representation to the Assam legislature would have to be dearly purchased if it was accompanied by disintegration of tribal customs and by the extension of the

revenue system and the law courts. He would also prefer the continuation of restrictions on moneylenders and land alienation.[11] The result was another memorandum submitted by some other Jaintias on 2 January 1929, demanding the maintenance of the existing restrictions on land alienation and extension of the High Court's jurisdiction on the British villages of the Jaintia hills.[12] The Government of Assam told the Simon Commission that the Khasis of Shillong and Jowai had 'a keen desire for a voice in the administration', though the chiefs and their subjects might not favour it.[13] The only 'reform' granted to them under the 1935 Act was increased representation in the legislature.

After the report of the Indian States Commission, from 1932 attempts were made by the Khasi states to set up a Khasi States' Federation. In 1933 the Association of Khasi States presented a memorandum to Viceroy Willingdon who was visiting Shillong, demanding representation of the Khasi states in the proposed Indian federal legislature. Willingdon assured them of representation after the Khasi states had united. The federation came into being early in 1934,[14] decided to send its representative to the Chamber of Princes and demanded the curtailment of the deputy commissioner's powers. In the autumn of 1935 the federation requested the government to deal with the former's 'standing committee', which derived its authority from the individual member states composing the association. Yet no reservation of seats for the Khasi states was made in the federal legislature and the recognition granted in May 1934 was withdrawn in a short while.[15] The scheme for the participation of Indian states in the Indian federation itself did not materialise. But the move by the Khasi siems, the 'customary' chiefs, reflected a definite political ambition.

The only other hill district where political activity in the form of a 'social' movement was recorded in the second decade of this century was the Naga district. In 1918 a Naga Club was set up at Kohima with officials and a few village headmen.[16] The Simon Commission recorded that beyond Dimapur they had met representatives of the northeast frontier people including the Naga.[17] But there is no mention of any Lushai representation. The Naga Club speaking on behalf of the Naga demanded of the Simon Commission exclusion from the reforms scheme. 'You are

the only people who have ever conquered us and, when you go, we should be as we were,' the leader of the delegation is reported to have said. 'The Nagas recall that Mr Attlee and the honourable Mr Cadogan, who visited Kohima, smiled when they heard this.'[18]

Around 1930, several mushroom 'tribal' organisations of small groups were born, sometimes with official backing. MacDonald Khar-Kongor reportedly tried to unify them into a kind of Hills Union, but failed. The greatest obstacle to the move appears to have been the influence of Nichols-Roy, then in the government. In the Mizo hills, some 'commoners' raised a demand for representation to the Provincial Assembly in 1928. The movement was suppressed.

The 1937 elections in Assam resulted in a coalition government under the able and moderate Muslim politician, Mohammad Saadulla. It included Nichols-Roy. Very soon, however, manoeuvres were started to oust the government. The tensions generated by the moves and countermoves led to a small-scale Khasi–Bengali riot in Shillong after which Subhas Chandra Bose visited the place as Congress president. During his stay, the Khasi Hills District Congress was set up with MacDonald Khar-Kongor as president. Some government supporters, including the two Garo MLAs, crossed the floor and Saadulla resigned. The Congress formed the government in Assam and continued till the outbreak of the Second World War when the government again went to Saadulla.

On the Threshold of Freedom

About the middle of 1947, when the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas subcommittee of the advisory committee of the Constituent Assembly toured the hills, it noted that 'the Hill people, even in the Excluded Areas, were not found lacking in political consciousness. Perhaps (not without instigation by certain elements), this consciousness was used to instill ideas of an independent status, the external relations under which would be governed by treaty or agreement only.'[19] The war and the British preparation for departure had cast their spell on the northeastern hills.

The new phase of the movement had started first in the Khasi hills. In early 1946, a Khasi–Jaintia Political Association was set up at Shillong, mainly with the backing of the siems, which in March 1946 submitted a 'memorial' to the Secretary of State for India and the Cabinet Mission, and to His Excellency the Governor of Assam and the deputy commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia hills. The 'memorial' stressed that the Khasis 'belong to a race quite distinctly individual from any other race in India living in democratic communes,' and have 'preserved their characteristic independence and ancient democratic institutions from time immemorial.' They did 'owe a deep gratitude to the British crown' for preserving this individuality and showed apprehension for the future change, as 'the last election' in January 1946, in which Nichols-Roy had been returned on a Congress ticket and accompanied by a Congress woman, Bonelly Khongman (Khasi), had shown that a mixed electorate (as in Shillong) would deprive the indigenous people of real representation. The 'memorial' called for a federation of the Khasi areas *within* a 'sovereign Assam', with adequate 'cultural and political autonomy.'[20]

There was an anecdote behind this reference to the 'last election'. In the Assam Provincial Legislative Assembly elections of early 1946, the Congress ticket for the Shillong (male) seat was expected by MacDonald Khar-Kongor who had been leading the district Congress organisation since 1938. Through a thoughtful but backdoor manoeuvre at the provincial level of Congress leadership, the ticket was awarded to Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy. His success was overwhelming and MacDonald and the chiefs were furious. An impetuous personality, MacDonald left the Congress and founded the Hills Union with a demand for a hill state. In his pamphlet, *A Case of the Hills Tribes of the North-East Frontier of India* (June 1946), submitted for the consideration of 'the Authorities and Parties concerned', he launched a personal attack on Nichols-Roy and expressed communal hatred towards the second largest community in Shillong, namely the Bengalis (from Sylhet) who, in spite of being a privileged class in the British period, had been MacDonald's main political supporters as far as his position in the Congress was concerned, and had now voted for Nichols-Roy.

Nichols-Roy also submitted a memorandum opposing the idea of a Crown Colony as well as of total integration. He stressed the need for preserving Khasi customs and traditions and proposed a Khasi–Jaintia federated state on the following lines:

1. There should be no difference between the Khasi states and the British area. The treaties between the Khasi states and the British government should be null and void.
2. The Khasi states with their administration should remain as they were with the exception that they should be reformed to bring them to the properly constituted administration which should be more advanced.
3. There should be a legislative body with 25 members to be elected by 25 constituencies into which the whole district was to be divided. This legislative body should have powers to reform any part of the local administration and should have power also to make laws for the whole district in regard to administration, finance and land.
4. There should be a Khasi Federated Court with three elected judges as the final court of appeal from all local authorities.
5. There should be an executive council of not more than three members, one of whom would be its president. The council should have executive powers to be defined by law.[21]

The Crown Colony

Although the Simon Commission advised the exclusion of the Assam hills from the scheme of constitutional reform, N. E. Parry's suggestion for the constitution of the hills of Assam and Burma into one administrative unit continued to possess the late British administrators and grew into the so-called Coupland Plan for a Crown Colony[22] in 1947.

In the Naga hills, in April 1945 the deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills District, C. R. Pawsey, had established the Naga Hills District Tribal Council as a forum of the various Naga groups in the district. In February 1946 this body was reorganised as a political platform called the Naga National Council, under the leadership of Aliba Imti Ao, the son of a

pastor. The Bardoloi subcommittee noted in the middle of 1947 that, 'Though a non-official political organisation, many of its leaders and members are Government officials and the organisation has also received official recognition locally.' This 'anomalous position of Government servants participating in political activity' was due to the fact that 'the educated, influential and leading elements are Government servants.' When the report of the Cabinet Mission was published, the NNC in June 1946 passed a resolution at Wokha demanding autonomy within Assam and opposing both the Crown Colony and 'grouping'.

Gopinath Bardoloi, the Congress Premier of Assam, visited the district in November 1946. Early in 1947 the Governor of Assam, Sir Andrew Clow, visited the Naga hills and advised the Nagas that their future lay with India and with Assam. Towards the end of February 1947, the Naga National Council passed a resolution in which they called for the establishment of 'an Interim Government' of Nagas with financial provisions for a period of ten years, at the end of which the Naga people should be left to choose any form of government. Subsequently the Naga National Council sent another memorandum in which they mentioned a 'guardian power' without, however, stating who should be the guardian power. It was found that they were extremely reluctant to express explicitly their choice between the three possibilities of the Government of India, the provincial government and His Majesty's Government. It would appear that this was the formula on which a general measure of agreement could be obtained among the Naga since there were clear indications that many of them were inclined to take a moderate view, more on the lines of the original resolution passed at Wokha. But in view of the intransigence of certain other members, probably of the Angami group, they were prevented from doing so.

Sir Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam, personally went to the Naga hills and, assisted by the secretary to the Government of Assam, Phillip Adams, and the deputy commissioner of the Naga hills, Charles Pawsey, worked out a nine point understanding with the Naga National Council. The Bardoloi subcommittee claimed to have met the 'substance of the claims made by the Nagas', namely, 'to maintain their customary laws

and courts, management of their land with its resources, the continuance of the regulations by which entry and residence in the hills could be controlled and a review of the whole position after ten years.'[23]

Before McCall retired as superintendent of the Lushai hills, during the Second World War, he was perturbed by the diminution of the chiefs' authority and drafted a scheme for a District Chiefs' Durbar to advise the administration on the regulation of the social life of the people. His successor, MacDonald, convened a District Conference in January 1946 with 20 representatives each from the chiefs and the commoners chosen separately. The undemocratic character of the District Conference is evident from the fact that while the number of all the big and small chiefs in the district was about 60, the election of the commoners' representatives was based on 'household franchise' at the rate of one vote for ten houses. The superintendent installed himself as the president of the conference. 'The conference apparently created little enthusiasm and the large representation of the chiefs on it must have caused some dissatisfaction,' wrote the Bardoloi subcommittee. By October 1946 the conference practically disintegrated.

Shortly before the visit of the subcommittee to the district, the conference was revived, this time being jointly elected by the chiefs and the commoners. The ratio of chiefs to commoners was maintained, as a result of which the Mizo Union, the vanguard of the 'black-coat revolution' foreseen by McCall, boycotted it. To the subcommittee, which was impressed that the District Conference was completely dominated by the superintendent, he suggested a scheme that all local affairs should be managed by a constitutional body elected by the district which should have its own officers. The Government of Assam or of the Union should pay only a certain sum of money amounting to the deficit of the district and enter into an agreement regarding the defence of the district and its external relations. To what extent the Lushais could actually manage their own affairs efficiently in every matter other than defence the superintendent himself was not clear. In answer to a question whether he thought that the whole administration could be managed by them, he had said, 'I will not guarantee that it could be done.' More than in the Naga hills, the Bardoloi subcommittee found that in the

Lushai hills there were reasonable sections of the population who were concerned mainly with the protection of their lands, social customs and interests.

Politics of Integration

The excluded area of the North Cachar Subdivision of the Cachar District was the home of different tribes who had little feeling of solidarity among themselves, but had a closer geographical, cultural and religious connection with the plains, and were educationally more backward than the people of the two partially excluded areas. The subdivisional officer had, shortly before, set up a tribal council in which the Mikirs and the Nagas of the subdivision refused to participate. Naturally, the north Cachar hills posed no major problems for the Bardoloi subcommittee. The Frontier tracts were miserably backward, and were not among the autonomy seekers. There were, however, legal and international problems concerning them that are dealt with elsewhere in this book.

The partially excluded areas of the Garo Hills District and the Mikir Hill Tracts of the Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts had some common political experiences, at least since 1937, and considerable connection with the plains. The Mikir MLA, Khorsing Terang, and the son of a Mikir pastor at Golaghat, S. S. Engti, took the lead in early 1947 in setting up a *Karbia Durbar* (Mikir assembly) mostly with plains Mikirs. They desired consolidation of the Mikir areas, protection of customs and extension of franchise.

The subcommittee found the Garo as a whole 'pretty backward', though the Christian missions were active among them. 'After the Second World War, however, the people of the Garo Hills became visibly conscious of their identity as a result of growing literacy, intensified contact with the outsiders through a spate of trade and business during the war, demonstrative effects of the freedom movement in the neighbouring areas, return of Garo ex-servicemen into the society with their varied experience about the advanced countries, and, above all, the growth of a class of teacher-leaders in different villages with Church-societies.'[24] A draft constitution was submitted to

the Bardoloi subcommittee at Gauhati by the Garo National Conference, demanding all powers of government including that of taxation and administration of justice for the local council, maintaining links with the provincial government in respect of a few subjects like higher education and medical aid and with the central government in respect of defence, external affairs and communication.

'A feeling common to all of the Hill Districts is that people of the same tribe should be under a common administration', noted the Bardoloi subcommittee. 'This had led to a demand for rectification of boundaries. The Lushai want the Kuki of Manipur and other areas in their boundaries. The Naga want the Zemi areas of the North Cachar Hills in their district and so on.'

Thus in the Assam hills, political awareness grew first in the Khasi hills, the most developed of the hill districts and the seat of the provincial capital. In the other hills, political participation really began with the reforms of 1937. Since the fall of the coalition government of Saadulla, the Congress started developing its organisation in the partially excluded areas of Assam, but was still denied entry into the totally excluded areas. In the 1930s the Congress was born in the Tripura and Manipur states. But except in Tripura – and that too chiefly among the plains people – the Congress could never win a substantial following. Almost all the hill people remained uninterested in the party. Working in Assam from 1942, the Communist party too failed to enrol any hill person as member,[25] but at the end of the Second World War, the student wing of the party began to be active in Shillong. In 1946 there was an all-Assam students' conference in Shillong in which even some Naga and Lushai students took part. One of them later became the secretary of the Naga National Council (Aliba), another the secretary of the Mizo Union (Vanthuama), both ending up in government jobs. In Calcutta, an Assam Hill Student's Association was formed in 1945. The weekly *Assam Tribune* reported the first debate held by this body at the Scottish Church College hall in Calcutta, with G. G. Swell[26] in the chair. The motion on the desirability of the hill people's participation in the national struggle was carried by a majority of three.

It is also to be noted that political movements in the hills were at best district oriented. There was no united approach. In

late 1945 MacDonald Khar-Kongor, after his frustration with the Congress, initiated a Hills Union with handpicked persons from the different hills of Assam, Tripura and Manipur, but he did not succeed in developing this into a sustained movement. In the first week of November 1947, at Nichols-Roy's initiative a hills–plains (unity) week was held in Shillong. About 450 delegates from the Naga, Lushai, Garo, Manipur and Jowai hills and the Tirap, Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts attended the conference. At the end of the session on 9 November, the delegates had tea at Nichols-Roy's place. In a speech there, Nichols-Roy called for hills–plains understanding and urged the hill people to learn Assamese. A negative reaction came from the president of the Garo National Conference, Williamson A. Sangma, who wanted Assam to be a composite state and opposed the imposition of the Assamese language on the hill people. Snehakumar Chakma called for the freeing of plains of Tripura, where many of his compatriots lived, from Pakistan and full statehood for the whole of Tripura. The secretary of the Mizo Union, Bawichhuaka, supported Chakma because many Mizos had the same problem. Bawichhuaka also opposed the imposition of Assamese.[27]

The hills –plains week could not lead to the establishment of a common political platform for all the hill people. But it showed a kind of understanding between Nichols-Roy's Khasi–Jaintia National Conference, Sangma's Garo National Conference and the Mizo Union.

Notes and References

1 Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy was the first hill person (Khasi) to be elected to the Assam legislature after the introduction of the Montford Reforms (1919). He claimed to have been associated with the Responsivist section of the Congress party for some time since 1926. Vide his *Personal Memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission*, Shillong, 1954.

2 Submission of Sib Charan Roy, A. M. Basaiaumoit and many others to the chief secretary to the Government of Assam, Political Department, reproduced in *U Nongpynim, Nai Lur* November, 1928.

3 The memorandum of the three to the Indian Statutory Commission, reproduced in *U Nongpynim, Nai Risau* December, 1928.
4 *U Nongpynim, Nai Lur* November, 1928.
5 The proceedings of the meeting in *U Nongpynim, Nai Lur* December, 1928.
6 Clause 15 of the constitution of the Federation of the Khasi Native States, suggested in Solomon's *Memorandum*.
7 Proceedings of the meeting.
8 Letter of Joban D. Marak, MLA, Tura, Garo Hills, to chief secretary to the Government of Assam, no. 45 G.J. dated 8 July 1939—personal collection of S. N. Lahiri, ex-MLA, Assam.
9 *Memorandum* reproduced in *U Nongpynim, Nai Wieng* December–January, 1928–29.
10 Memoranda of the Assam government, including Nichols-Roy's Note on the Constitutional Proposal.
11 *U Nongpynim, Nai Lur* November–December, 1928–29.
12 *U Nongpynim, Nai Wieng* December–January, 1928–29.
13 *Memorandum of the Government of Assam on the Working of the Reformed Government together with the Recommendations of the Local Government prepared for the Indian Statutory Commission*, July 1928, Calcutta, 1930, p. 18.
14 Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Shillong, 1967, p. 235.
15 Ibid., p. 236.
16 Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, Shillong, 1961, p. 49.
17 *Report of The Indian Statutory Commission*, (Simon Commission Report) 1930, vol. I, p. 75.
18 Elwin, op. cit., p. 49.
19 *Report* of the subcommittee.
20 The *Memorial* was signed by the secretary of the association, H. Lyngdoh.
21 Reproduced in his *Personal Memorandum* to the States Reorganisation Commission.
22 R. Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem of India*, part III, 1944, p. 164 and R. Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam*, London, 1966, p. 110.
23 Bardoloi's letter to the chairman, advisory committee, introducing his subcommittee's *Report*. Prakash Singh noted (*Nagaland*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1972, p. 93) a discrepancy between the copy of the Hydari 'understanding' preserved in the Governor's secretariat in Shillong, and the version put out by *Naga Nation* (June 1947), the mouthpiece of the Naga National Council regarding the Hydari 'agreement'. The former mentions

'Naga Council', the latter 'Naga National Council'. The government obviously had the district council in mind but did not repudiate the NNC version. The vagueness caused complications later.

24 Parimal Chandra Kar, 'A Decade of Garo Politics', *The Amrit Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 2 April 1970.

25 Prafulla Misra, 'Communist Movement in Assam', *North-Eastern Affairs*, Shillong, July–September 1972.

26 A Khasi student who later became Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

27 *The Shillong Times*, Shillong, 11 November 1947.

CHAPTER 5

The Transfer of Power

The foundation for the transfer of power in India was laid by the Cabinet Mission's Plan of 16 May 1946. Accordingly, the Constituent Assembly of India set up an advisory committee, which in turn set up three subcommittees to report and recommend on: (1) the North East Frontier (Assam) tribal and excluded areas, (2) the excluded and partially excluded areas in the provinces other than Assam, and (3) the tribal areas in the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan. The partition of India made the third redundant. The second subcommittee submitted its report in two instalments in August and September. The subcommittee on the Assam tribal and excluded areas was headed by Gopinath Bardoloi, Premier of Assam. The other members were Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, the Khasi leader, a minister of Assam and a member of the Constituent Assembly, Rupnath Brahma, a plains tribal leader, and A. V. Thakkar, a social worker among central Indian tribes and chairman of the second subcommittee. They toured all the hill districts of Assam except the Garo, where communication difficulties deterred them. They were assisted by B. N. Rau, the constitutional adviser to the Constituent Assembly, who had earlier served in Assam as a civilian. The subcommittee co-opted two members from the tribes of each of the districts visited, except the frontier tracts and the tribal area. All the co-opted members except those from the Naga hills fully endorsed the report[1] though certain sections of the hill people considered themselves unrepresented in the subcommittee. The subcommittee's report was submitted on 28 July 1947.

At the suggestion of the chairman of the advisory committee, the two subcommittees met and submitted a joint report to the advisory committee on 25 August 1947. Meanwhile the preparation of the draft constitution was progressing. The advisory committee recommended the incorporation of the recommendations in the draft constitution pending their

discussion in the advisory committee. The final acceptance of the recommendations by the advisory committee took place on 24 February 1948.[2] The reports of the subcommittees were formally placed in the Constituent Assembly, along with the draft constitution, after the partition of India had radically altered the perspective of the hills problem.

The Consequences of Partition

The district of Sylhet in Assam had a referendum and was partitioned. Except for that area, the boundaries of Assam were not affected. But the Garo inhabited border areas of Mymensingh and Rangpur (in Bengal) and the Khasi settlements in Sylhet went to Pakistan. The trade of the border hills was interrupted. The zamindari areas of Tripura were allotted to Pakistan. Most important, the Chittagong Hill Tract was lost by India. Many politicians today accuse Assam of having 'gifted' Sylhet to Pakistan. Though Sylhet was a Muslim majority area, its people were thought to be capable of being influenced in favour of India. But undoubtedly India had a much stronger case in respect of the Chittagong Hill Tract which went by default, creating several serious problems for this country.

Administered from Bengal since 1860 through Act XXII of 1860,[3] in a more or less similar way as the Assam hills, the Chittagong Hill Tract was situated between Hill Tipperah and the Lushai Hills District of Assam and inhabited mostly by Kuki–Chin groups. The area was divided into three circles – Chakma (2499 square miles), Bohmong (1935 square miles), and Mong (704 square miles) – controlled by their respective chiefs who called themselves rajas. The subcommittee on excluded and partially excluded areas (other than Assam) reported that 'The Chiefs have certain magisterial and appellate powers and out of the jhum tax of Rs 6 per family, Rs 2-8-0 goes to the chief, Rs 2-4-0 to the Government. On the ground that they are really tributary powers, the chiefs are claiming the status of Indian states and desire that three states corresponding to the circles should be set up.' This was the position in spite of a recommendation made in 1928 by J. P. Mills, that the chiefs should be relieved of the collection of jhum tax and their magisterial duties. The

subcommittee wanted this predominantly non-Muslim tract to be transferred to Assam after the partition of Bengal.

> The Lushai Hills form in part the hinterland of this district and, though communications to the east are not easy, they are not more difficult than with Chittagong. The Karnafuli provides a waterway to Demagiri which is connected with Lungleh in the Lushai Hills. The Chakma, Magh and Mro of these hills have probably their tribal origin in common with the Lushai and in any case the province of Assam is the home of many different tribes. The people themselves are strongly averse to inclusion in Bengal. They desired that the area should be set up as an autonomous district.[4]

The loss of the Chittagong Hill Tract created a number of problems for India. The Kuki–Chin solidarity over the southern part of Hill Tipperah, the Chittagong Hill Tract and the Lushai hills was broken, and intensified the kind of 'irredentist' feeling that had been growing among the people since the separation of India and Burma in 1937. In the absence of a natural boundary between the Lushai and the Chittagong hills, the area developed into a paradise for smugglers and outlaws.

The native states became free from British paramountcy on 15 August 1947. One member (Himmat Sing K. Maheshwari) had been sent from Cooch Behar to the Constituent Assembly, but he was recognised as the representative of not only Cooch Behar but also of Bhutan and Sikkim, indicating the expectation of the Indian leaders that Bhutan and Sikkim would join India. They did not. The Anglo-Chinese convention of 1890 had reduced Sikkim to a protectorate of British India. Since 1910 on the other hand, Bhutan's foreign relations were in the hands of the British Indian government, though Bhutan was not a protectorate. With the departure of the British from India, Bhutan was able to assert its independence, and in 1949 signed a 'treaty of perpetual peace and friendship' with India by which India retained control over Bhutan's external relations but granted internal autonomy, an annuity of Rs 5,00,000 and some territories from the northern border of Goalpara. In Sikkim the indigenous population, the Lepcha, were outnumbered by the Nepalese constituting four-fifths of the total population and the Tibetans constituting the ruling aristocracy. In 1947 the state Congress was founded and

it demanded the abolition of the landlords' powers, a responsible government and accession to India. The ruler foiled the move. Manipur and Tripura were grouped together and had one representative in the Constituent Assembly.

The Khasi states were too small, even collectively, to get any representation in the Constituent Assembly and had a further disadvantage in Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, the Khasi member of the Constituent Assembly who, by this time, was an avowed enemy of the Khasi chiefs. The siems' brief was held, oddly enough, by the only Assamese Muslim member of the drafting committee of the Assembly, Mohammad Saadulla, who during the third reading of the Constitution pointed out the 'constitutional anomaly' that, though the Khasi states had been included in the Sixth Schedule, 'up till now no agreement on settlement has been arrived at between the Constituent Assembly of the federation of the Khasi States and the Assam Government or the Government of India.' He recalled that a deputation of the Khasi chiefs to the drafting committee had solicited the protection of their right to be elected according to the social customs, and the customary right of the clans over their lands. Saadulla requested the future government to keep these interests in view.[5] The Bardoloi subcommittee had earlier reported that 'there is an understandable feeling among the people of the states that there should be a federation between the states and the British portions so that all the Khasi people are brought under a common administration. In the British areas, though there is now franchise, there is no statutory local body for local self-government. The States, on the other hand, enjoy certain rights, and the problem is to bridge the gap.'[6]

The greater 'problem' before the Government of India lay in obtaining the accession of the Khasi states, which in 1946 had formed a federation among themselves. By 15 December 1947, the signatures of all the siems were collected. On 17 October 1948, the Governor-General accepted the Instrument of Accession. In the Annexed Agreement the federation agreed that 'all existing administrative arrangements between the Dominion of India and the Province of Assam on the one hand and the Khasi States on the other' would, with certain exceptions, 'continue in force until new or modified arrangements have been arrived at between respective authorities concerned.' The

exceptions provided for a 'competent court of the Federation to exercise the judicial functions formerly vested in the political officer.' No appeal from its decision in 'matters of customary law' could be made. In other cases, an appeal could be made to the Governor until a High Court for Assam was set up. In the cases concerning non-Khasis, the court of the federation, instead of the Political Officer, would have trying power. They could voluntarily accept the jurisdiction of the state courts which, fulfilling certain conditions, could be given first, second and third class powers according to the Criminal Procedure Code. The appointment of magistrates to the courts of the federation and the states would be subject to the approval of the Governor in regard to their judicial competence, with the exception of excise, forests and land and water rights. The administrative functions of the states would be in common with the central and provincial governments. The balance of the Khasi states' deposit accounts would be made over to the federation. The federation requested the government to allow all Khasi villages in Assam, which wanted to reunite with the states, to do so. Other Khasi territories might also be allowed to join the federation as its units, if they so desired. For subjects of common legislative jurisdiction with Assam, the Khasi states should either be represented in, or associated with, the Assam legislature. During his visit to Shillong on 1 January 1948, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel expressed satisfaction over the accession of the siems.[7]

On 15 August 1947, the Provisional Constitution Order issued by the Governor-General came into force, abolishing all references to the 'tribal area' and the distinction between 'India' and 'British India', in effect severing all constitutional links of the Dominion of India with the native states and the 'tribal areas.' On 27 August 1947, the Extra-Provincial Jurisdiction Ordinance was issued by the Governor-General, of course with retrospective effect (from 15 August 1947), re-establishing the severed links. Under the ordinance two notifications were issued by the Governor-General. The first promulgated the Assam Tribal Area Order of 1947, confirming and giving effect to every instrument, that is, every notification, order, by-law, rule, regulation, process or directive made or issued in the exercise of any powers by or under Section 313 of the Government of India Act of 1935, or having effect as if so made or issued, and

in force immediately before 15 August 1947, in or in relation to the Assam tribal areas, 'as if it has been made or issued by the Central Government under the Extra-Provincial Jurisdiction Ordinance, 1947.' Every officer or authority, 'authorised by, or under any such instrument to exercise any functions in, and in relation to, the Assam Tribal Areas would continue to exercise those functions.'[8] According to the second notification, the Governor of Assam as an agent of the Governor-General of India in Council was authorised to continue to discharge his former functions in or in relation to the tribal areas on the frontiers of the province of Assam.[9] Before the end of the year, the ordinance was turned by the Dominion Legislature into the Extra-Provincial Jurisdiction Act.[10] On 26 January 1950, an adaptation order was issued, reconverting the Extra-Provincial Jurisdiction Act into the Foreign Jurisdiction Act. But it no longer applied to the native states that had meanwhile been integrated with India.

By this time, Cooch Behar was first placed under a chief commissioner and then (on 1 January 1950) integrated with Bengal. Tripura and Manipur were placed in the First Schedule to the Constitution as part C states. Bhutan and Sikkim were recognised as outside India and the territories of Assam were defined as including the Khasi states.[11]

Since 1870, a General Clauses Act (passed first in that year and subsequently in 1887 and 1897) was being used for the interpretation of the Indian statutes.[12] An Adaptation of Laws Order, issued on 26 January 1950, modified the General Clauses Act of 1870 so as to redefine 'India' as made of:

(a) as respects any period before the establishment of the Dominion of India, British India together with all territories of Indian Rulers then under the suzerainty of such an Indian Ruler and the tribal areas;
(b) as respects any period after the establishment of the Dominion of India and before the commencement of the Constitution, all territories for the time being included in that Dominion; and
(c) as respects any period after the commencement of the Constitution all territories for the time being comprised in the territory of India.[13]

Governor's Adviser

The story of the tribal areas will not be complete without a reference to its administrative pattern. Under the 1935 reforms, the Governor was assisted by a secretary in respect of the administration of the excluded and partially excluded areas, the exercise of political control on the tribal areas, and relations with states. On 23 October 1943, however, the services of J. P. Mills, till then secretary to the Governor of Assam, were placed at the disposal of the Government of India for employment as adviser for tribal areas and states to His Excellency the Governor of Assam.[14] The secretarial functions relating to the tribal areas continued to be disposed of by the Governor's secretariat. An important change brought about by the Provisional Constitution Order was the deletion of all 'discretion' of the Governor. The result was the transfer of the administration of the excluded areas and erstwhile 'reserved' power of the Governor to the ministers. The Government of Assam also took over the Governor's agency functions in relation to the native states and the tribal area. The position of the Political Agent to the states became redundant, though a Dominion Agent to Manipur functioned until 12 June 1948. The relations with the native states were governed by the standstill agreements until 16 January 1950 or by Section 290-A of the 1935 Act.[15]

The secretary to the Governor of Assam for the excluded areas became the secretary to the Department of Tribal Affairs in the Government of Assam. The adviser to the Governor of Assam on tribal areas became the adviser to the Government of Assam. Besides the responsibility for the tribal areas, the adviser, by some internal arrangement, got the responsibility for the excluded areas within it. In November 1947, the last British adviser, G. E. D. Walker, is found to have signed some notifications as adviser to the Governor on tribal and excluded areas and states.[16] The adviser's position remained technically non-administrative till 26 January 1950, when it assumed a different character.

The new position of the adviser related to what became known as the North East Frontier Agency where the Bardoloi subcommittee had discovered a great paradox in the

administrative structure. The subcommittee noted that there was no demarcation of the boundaries of the frontier tracts, apart from the external boundary of Assam according to Section 60 of the Government of India Act of 1919. As a result of this the external boundary of the tracts remained as the external boundary of the province of Assam. Further, in 1936 the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts were declared excluded areas *within* Assam. The central government which bore the cost of their administration treated them as tribal areas within the meaning of Section 311 of the Government of India Act. On the other hand, the local officials treated the areas as consisting of two parts: 'One which they class Excluded Areas and stretches up to the "Inner Line" boundary and the Tribal Area, which by them is understood to mean the area roughly beyond the "Inner Line" boundary.' The subcommittee held that 'this treatment does not appear to be strictly justifiable in law though it may be convenient to think of the administered plains portion of the area separately from the not fully administered hills.' The result of this treatment was that the Naga Tribal Area and the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur or Tirap Frontier Tracts fell 'under one category'.[17] The subcommittee considered it essential 'to establish administration and control over the whole area right up to the frontier', and recommended that 'when the Central Government which now administers these areas (and which we consider it should continue to do with the Government of Assam as its agent) is of the view that the administration has been satisfactorily established over a sufficiently wide area, the Government of Assam should take over that area by the strength of a notification'.

Hurdles to Integration

While the Constituent Assembly of India was labouring on the constitutional scheme for the Assam hills, the Manipur Maharaja convened an Interim Council, consisting of four officials, one representative of the maharaja and five non-official representatives from the hills and the Imphal valley. The council drafted the Manipur State Constitution Act of 1947, and the Manipur State Hills People's (Administration)

Regulation of 1947. On 12 June 1948, the last Dominion Agent (successor to the Political Agent) left Manipur, handing over all administrative responsibilities to the maharaja. Towards the end of 1948, Manipur became a constitutional monarchy, with a Legislative Assembly consisting of 53 members (including 18 hill persons). The Speaker of the Assembly and two ministers were hill persons. Thereafter, Manipur hesitated for a time before signing the Instrument of Merger with India on 21 September 1949. A chief commissioner took over its administration on 15 October 1949, as the Council of Ministers and the legislature of Manipur were dissolved.[18] The merger was indeed hastened by unrest in the hills and by the first leftist movement under the legendary leadership of Irabat Singh of the Communist party, occasioned by a virtual famine in 1948.

Under growing public pressure, Tripura became the first native state to accede to India.[19] The States' People's Conference demanded reforms, which were promised by the maharaja. In the predominantly Muslim area of the maharaja's Chakla–Roshanabad zamindari, a party called Anjuman-e-Islamia raised the demand for Tripura's merger with Pakistan. An extremist organisation of the hill people, called Sengkrak,[20] also raised its head and for some time acted in collaboration with the Anjuman-e-Islamia. The maharaja, in the midst of this difficult situation, finally decided to merge with India, though he was alleged to have given patronage to the disruptors. On 9 September 1949, the merger took place. On October 15 a chief commissioner took over Tripura's administration.[21]

At least one Khasi siem (the siem of Nongstoin) resisted the accession to India and his adviser had to flee to Pakistan. After the accession of the Khasi states, the Governor of Assam convened a Khasi States Constitution-making Durbar. The elections were held in late 1948 and early 1949. For contesting the elections, Nichols-Roy formed the Khasi–Jaintia Federated States National Conference to achieve his objective. The opponents of the Sixth Schedule were organised as the Khasi States People's Union, led by R. R. Thomas, a former lecturer in a government college and brother of Nichols-Roy, G. G. Swell, Mavis Dunn, the first woman in Assam to have been a minister, the siem of Khyriem and Roy Bahadur D. Ropmay. The People's Union wanted the incorporation of the siems' rights,

as recognised in the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement. The durbar met from 11 to 21 July 1949. The chiefs once again proved themselves to be more than 'representatives of the people', when they obtained 22 seats in the constitution-making durbar, as against 55 popular representatives and 7 nominated members. Constitution making for India was, by this time, well on the way to completion. Nichols-Roy in the durbar proposed the acceptance of the Sixth Schedule. Though among the elected members he had a slight majority, the chiefs and their supporters had an edge over him in the total membership of the durbar, as was revealed by his 40–46 defeat.[22] The result of the chiefs' stand was that no instrument of merger was signed with the Government of India and the Khasi siemships were put within Assam by an Act of State, namely the promulgation of the Constitution of India.

Tasks before the Constituent Assembly

Things were, on the whole, pretty messy in northeastern India, which epitomised India not only in terms of human composition but also in the multiplicity of its problems. The response of the Indian leadership to the challenge of this region was, however, inadequate, evidently due to its preoccupation with the all-India problem. A regional approach to the nation's problems was not contemplated at that stage. Even the demands for linguistic states were shelved by the Constituent Assembly. The most important weakness of the leadership, however, was the absence of a thorough policy and knowledge in respect of the northeast. The average member of the Constituent Assembly had for his or her guidance only one resolution of the Congress party that had been passed in 1936 at Faizpur, condemning the creation of excluded and partially excluded areas and the chief commissioner's provinces, under the 1935 Act, as 'yet another attempt to divide the people into different groups with unjustifiable and discriminatory treatment, and to obstruct the growth of uniform democratic institutions in the country'. The resolution had regarded the separation of the excluded and partially excluded areas 'intended to have a larger control of disposition and exploitation of the universal

and forest wealth in those areas, and keep the inhabitants of those areas apart from the rest of India for easier exploitation and suppression.'[23]

The only all-India leader who cared about the Assam hills was Jawaharlal Nehru. During his visit to Assam in December 1937, he had found that poverty, the main problem of India, 'was terribly in evidence'. Among the various local problems there were, besides oil, 'opium, the future of Sylhet, immigration and the Line system, the tea gardens, and more especially the labour employed there, and the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas with the various tribal folk inhabiting them'.[24] Nehru spoke sentimentally of the heroic exploits of Rani Guidiliu (though he spelt her name wrongly as 'Gindalo',[28]) and of the plight of the hill people. 'No people of India require more helpful sympathy and cooperation from their countrymen than these tribal folk and others who live cut off from us in these areas.'[26]

Even the knowledge of the few representatives of Assam was frankly inadequate. As Rohini Kumar Choudhury told the Assembly on 6 September 1949, even the Assam Premier could not visit the hills during the British period without a permit from the Governor. Even Nichols-Roy's knowledge was mainly confined to the Khasi hills and on the eve of Independence, he was in the United States. Saadulla, himself a member of the drafting committee, seemingly did not take much interest in the hills problem. The other two representatives of Assam, who cared about the hills, were openly hostile to Bardoloi's approach to the problem based on conciliation and compromise. Consequently, the Constituent Assembly's discussion on the draft Sixth Schedule was somewhat chaotic. Rohini Kumar Choudhury and Kuladhar Chaliha advanced the extreme assimilationist view. 'We want to assimilate the tribal people. We were not given that opportunity so far', said Choudhury.[27] He accused the scheme of reflecting the British mind. 'There is the old separatist tendency and you want to keep them away from us. You will thus be creating a *tribalstan* just as you have created a Pakistan. The ultimate result will be that you will create a Communistan...'.[28] He was particularly apprehensive about the misuse of autonomy by the Naga. Chaliha moved an amendment seeking to exclude Dimapur from the Naga district, as Dimapur had once been the capital of the Kachari

kingdom, and the whole of Shillong, the provincial capital, from the Khasi–Jaintia Autonomous District.[29] He had earlier objected to the inclusion of the Khasi siemships in the district. The top leaders of the Constituent Assembly, like Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel, were silent. But a rather clumsy approach was made by B. R. Ambedkar, chairman of the drafting committee, who said that the policy of the Sixth Schedule was similar to the '(aboriginal) Indian' policy of the US government. He theorised that the hill people of Assam were not Hinduised and, therefore, had a civilisation and culture very different from that of the rest of Assam.[30]

Like Nehru, Ambedkar had little to do with the framing of the Sixth Schedule, which was produced by the labour of three men, Bardoloi, Nichols-Roy and B. N. Rau (the constitutional adviser who had spent several years in Assam as a civilian). Giving the 'background' of the draft Sixth Schedule, Bardoloi said:

> It is not unknown to you that the rule of the British Government and the activities of the foreign Missionaries always went together...During the war, the then rulers and officers developed in the minds of these tribal people a sense of separation and isolation and gave them assurances that at the end of the war they will be independent states managing their affairs in their own way. They were made to believe that the entire hills would be constituted into a province and put under some irresponsible government. You might possibly have read in the papers that plans were hatched in England in which the ex-Governors of Assam evidently took part, to create a sort of kingdom over there.[31]

The correct policy was, therefore, to remove their doubt and integrate them in a Gandhian way, said Bardoloi. The sub-committee headed by him had earlier warned that the hill people had 'not yet been assimilated with the people of the plains of Assam' though a great proportion of the plains tribals had gone a long way towards assimilation. 'Assimilation has probably advanced least in the Naga Hills and Lushai Hills, and the policy of exclusion has of course tended to create a feeling of separateness.'[32]

Besides the problem of 'grouping', northeast India was confronted with:

1. The problem of the 'plains tribal' people of Assam, who did 'form an important section of the population of Assam'.[33] The main groups among them were, besides the tea garden labourers, the Kachari, the Boro Kachari, the Mech, the Rabha, the Lalung, the Sonwal, the Deori, the Miri, the Motok and the Moron, most of whom had become Hinduised, while a few were converts to Christianity. Rupnath Brahma, a plains tribal leader and a member of the minority rights subcommittee of the advisory committee of the Constituent Assembly, though not a member of the Constituent Assembly, demanded 'all the fundamental rights of a citizen in the future Constitution of India' and 'special safeguards' for them, proportional representation in the legislature and executive of the central government, a 25 per cent weightage in representation to the provincial legislature, reservation of at least three posts in the Assam cabinet, due share in the central and provincial services, protection of land from exploitation, and religious and cultural freedom. 'Some blocks or belts will have to be created for these people where other non-tribal people should not be allowed to take settlement of lands and where the sale or transfer of lands to the non-tribal should be strictly prohibited.'[34]

The Bardoloi subcommittee, passed the burden on to the minority rights subcommittee, as 'the population of the plains tribes which is being gradually assimilated to the population of the plains, should, for all practical purposes, be treated as a minority'. In the minority rights subcommittee Brahma wanted a specified guarantee for reservation of land for the backward classes 'such as the Assam Tribes'.[35] The subcommittee, and later the advisory committee, accepted the amendment[36] and the Constitution made provision for the imposition of a reasonable restriction by law on the right to freedom of property, for the protection of the interests of any scheduled tribe.[37] The provision left much of the fate of the scheduled tribes to the discretion of the government. The protection of the Fifth Schedule was neither sought in the Constituent Assembly nor granted.

The Brahmaputra valley is still inhabited by a large number of plains tribals – wholly agricultural but mostly landless – who have not yet been properly integrated into the Hindu caste system. A plains tribals movement started gaining momentum in parts of the Brahmaputra valley.[38]

2. The problem of the princely states, because of its all-India dimension, missed the special attention needed in the northeastern region. Tripura and Manipur were partly 'tribal' states. The Cabinet Mission could not anticipate the complete integration of the Indian states with India and therefore did not lay down any scheme for the minorities therein. Because of Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy's perseverance, the Khasi states were put under the scheme of the Sixth Schedule. No special arrangement was made for the hill areas of Tripura and Manipur. Perhaps the Constituent Assembly felt that, as the integrated Indian states would be constituted as part B and part C states under the rigorous control of the Centre, no special scheme for their minorities would be necessary.

Notes and References

1 Bardoloi's introductory note to his subcommittee's *Report*. See B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents*, vol. III. The Khasi and the Lushai chiefs resented the denial of representation to them.

2 B. Shiva Rao, op. cit., pp. 780–82.

3 Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 342.

4 *Report of the Sub-Committee on the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas* (other than Assam) in B. Shiva Rao, op. cit.

5 *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. XI, p. 735.

6 *Report* of the subcommittee.

7 The Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement was reproduced as an Appendix to the *Memorial of the Khasi Tribal Chiefs to the President of India*, dated 15 June 1968. See also Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Shillong, 1967, p. 241.

8 The Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Notification No. 387-NEF, dated 30 October 1947; *The Gazette of India*, 31 October 1947, part I, section 1.

9 Notification No. 388-NEF, ibid.

10 The *Gazette of India Extra-ordinary*, 24 December, 1947.

11 *The Constitution of India, 1950, First Schedule.*

12 Article 367 makes only the General Clauses Act of 1897 relevant to the interpretation of the Constitution of India.
13 Section 3, Subsection 28 of the General Clauses Act.
14 *The Assam Gazette*, 3 November 1943, part I.
15 Section 290-A was added to the Government of India Act of 1935 by the Constituent Assembly of India, through an amendment.
16 See for instance, *The Assam Gazette*, 26 November 1947, part I.
17 *Report* of the Bardoloi subcommittee.
18 Government of India, Ministry of States, Notification No. 219, dated 15 October 1949, issued by virtue of the Extra-Provincial Jurisdiction Act of 1947 and all other powers enabling it, paragraph 7; *The Manipur Code*, vol. I, Superintendent of Government Press, Manipur, 1963, pp. 268–69. Also see *White Paper on Indian States*, pp. 232–34.
19 Sachindralal Sinha, 'Freedom Movement in Tripura', *The Amrit Bazar Patrika*, centenary supplement, 27 March 1968, p. 127.
20 'Sengkrak' means a closed fist.
21 *White Paper on Indian States*, pp. 229–31.
22 Bareh, op. cit., pp. 241–48.
23 *The Indian Annual Register*, 1936, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1937, p. 200.
24 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Unity of India*, Lindsay Drummond, London, 1940, p. 190.

It may be pointed out that opium plantation was introduced in Assam by the British; Sylhet was joined with Assam when the latter became a chief commissioner's province; immigration of Bengalis (mostly Muslim) gave birth to the Line system during British administration; and tea plantation and oil drilling in Assam were completely British ventures. The system of exclusion has already been seen as a British administrative arrangement. Nehru, then, was in favour of Sylhet returning to Bengal on linguistic grounds.

25 Ibid., pp. 187–88.
26 Ibid., p. 197.
27 *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. IX, p. 1005.
28 Ibid., p. 1008.
29 Ibid., pp. 1079–81.
30 Ibid., p. 1025.
31 Ibid., p. 1011.
32 *Report* of the Bardoloi subcommittee.
33 Ibid.,
34 Rupnath Brahma's memorandum to the minority rights subcommittee of the advisory committee of the Constituent

Assembly of India and B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution, Select Documents*, vol. II, p. 370.

35 Ibid., p. 372.

36 Proceedings of the minority rights subcommittee, ibid., p. 205.

37 Article 19(5) of the *Constitution of India*.

38 In 1967, a Plains Tribal Council demanded a union territory named 'Udayachal'. See S. K. Chaube, 'Plains Tribals in Assam Politics', *North-Eastern Affairs* (Quarterly), Shillong, Annual No. 1973.

CHAPTER 6

The Sixth Schedule

The most remarkable thing about the Bardoloi *Report* was the skill with which the subcommittee sought to reconcile the hill people's demand for 'political' autonomy with the Assam government's drive to integrate them with the plains. The instrument, it was proposed, would be the district council which would protect the hill people from unscrupulous plains people.

'A demand common to the Naga Hills, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills and the Lushai Hills is that all powers of taxation should vest in the National Councils,' wrote the subcommittee. The Garo National Conference and the Khasi–Jaintia Federated States National Conference suggested a contribution to the provincial revenues or a sharing of certain items. The subcommittee confessed, 'The question of finance and powers of taxation in an atmosphere of suspicion and fear is not an easy one.' But 'If this were accepted even the Centre would have no powers to levy finances in these areas,' virtually amounting to the breaking up of the provincial administration. 'Bedsides, giving unregulated powers of taxation in general to small units is undesirable...' They should rather, 'have all the powers which local bodies in a plains district enjoy.'

The local tribal organisations served as the 'suitable background for self-government' though the 'tribes altogether lack the experience of modern self-governing institutions'. Basically territorial in nature, and intended to replace the various tribal councils and conferences, the proposed district council would be more than a local board. 'It is proposed to entrust these councils with powers of legislation and administration over land, village forest, agriculture and village and town management in general in addition to the administration of tribal or local law... We recommend that primary education should be administered by local Councils without interference by the Government of Assam.' It was not thought desirable to

leave secondary education to these councils. 'The Local Councils will have powers of management in all other matters usually administered by Local Boards and we consider that on account of the special circumstances in the hills the Councils should have powers to make their own administrative regulations and rules. We expect, however, that in all matters, particularly those involving technical matters like the management of dispensaries or construction of roads, the Local Councils and their staff will work under the executive guidance of the corresponding Provincial Department.'

Philosophy for Hills Administration

The joint report of the subcommittees on the tribal and excluded areas of the North-East Frontier (Assam) and the excluded and partially excluded areas (other than Assam) noted greater 'potentialities for quick progress' and 'eagerness for reform' in some of the Assam hills than elsewhere and endorsed the recommendations of the Bardoloi subcommittee. It noted that 'the Assam Hills and Frontier Tracts are divided into fairly large districts inhabited by single tribes or fairly homogeneous exclusive tribes with highly democratic and mutually exclusive tribal organisation and with very little of the plains leaven which is so common a feature of the corresponding areas, particularly the partially excluded areas of other Provinces'. Except in small isolated areas this was generally not the case in the other provinces. The tribal population in the other provinces had assimilated to a considerable extent the life and ways of the plains, and tribal organisation had in many places completely disintegrated.[1] The subcommittee noted the importance attached by the hill people to the Inner Line system and the Chin Hills Regulation as protective measures although such measures had preserved them as 'anthropological specimens'.

The advisory committee met on 24 February 1948 to consider the Bardoloi subcommittee's *Report*, after the recommendations had actually been incorporated in the draft constitution. Nichols-Roy now proposed an amendment to impose the High Court's appellate authority over the district courts 'where there is failure of justice or where the authority exercised by the

District Court is without jurisdiction."[2] On its acceptance by the advisory committee, the drafting committee later moved it as an amendment, in a slightly modified form. The Constituent Assembly accepted it. At last the High Court's jurisdiction was imposed on the Assam hills. Nichols-Roy's earlier objection to it was dropped obviously due to the changed circumstances. In the British period, whereas the British deputy commissioners occasionally steamrollered the native customs, the traditionalists felt that the High Court would be a conservative influence. After the establishment of the district councils, the role of the conservator of the native customs would naturally pass on to the district councils. The High Court, on the other hand, would possibly play the role of an integrationist moderator. According to the Bardoloi *Report*, the draft constitution prepared by B.N. Rau permitted a few discretionary powers to the Governor of Assam. In April 1948, a special committee headed by Nehru recommended the abolition of 'discretion' of Governors.[3] The special committee also recommended that 'as far as possible there should be no centrally administered areas except for strategic or defence purposes. If there remain any such areas, they should be provided with the largest measure of autonomy after ascertaining the wishes of the people therein.'[4] Consequently, the drafting committee in October 1948 decided to remove the Assam Governor's discretionary role in the annulment and suspension of Acts and Resolutions of the district and regional councils and withholding of state laws from the autonomous districts. However, 'the discretion' was retained in the Governor's arbitrational role in the disputes between the state government and the district councils, on the sharing of royalties on mining licences and leases. More important, the Governor was granted discretion in the administration of the part B tribal areas (the frontier tracts and the Naga Tribal Area),[5] on which the Bardoloi subcommittee had recommended the continued administration of the Union government through the Government of Assam as its agent.

The draft constitution had provided that the boundaries of the autonomous districts could be altered by the Governor, that is, the state government, only if two-thirds of the members of the autonomous district council agreed to it and after a commission had reported on the working of the district councils. By an

amendment the requirement of the district council's consent was dropped. The Governor was also empowered to unite two or more of such districts. Thus, changes in the territorial composition of the autonomous districts could be brought about by the Governor of Assam, upon the advice of the Council of Ministers of Assam. But any exclusion of territory from part B tribal areas depended upon the consent of the President, that is, the Government of India. Merger or split of autonomous districts indeed should involve amendment of the Constitution, though no amendment was made when the UK–J Hills District was split into two separate autonomous districts.[6] As a result, there is a great deal of interlocking of the central and state governmental authorities on the territorial questions of the tribal areas.

The Constituent Assembly fixed the strength of the district council at a maximum of 24 instead of between 20 and 40. The other changes included the requirement of the Governor's assent to the Acts of the district councils, removal of the restrictions on the government's power to grant mining licences and leases, and removal of the power of the district councils to recommend the withholding of a central or state law from an autonomous district.[7] The result of such changes was not altogether happy as will be apparent from Nichols-Roy's own reactions in the Constituent Assembly. During the introductory discussion on the draft constitution, he said (on 8 November 1949):

> I must especially thank the Drafting Committee for accepting the draft for the creation of District Councils with autonomy in the Hills districts in Assam which, in the Sixth Schedule, are called Autonomous Districts. These Hills districts, inhabited by tribal hill people, will under this Constitution be able to develop themselves according to their own genius and culture. The result, I believe, will be charming if these Autonomous Districts are nurtured to develop themselves in their own way without disturbing the main purpose of unity underlying the Constitution...[8]

During the second reading of the draft constitution, however, on 6 September 1949, while emotions were running high in the Constituent Assembly, Nichols-Roy protested against the view that 'the hill areas were given too much. They have not been given enough according to their own ideas. But at the

same time they have been brought under the control of the Government of Assam. And that is the process by which they will be unified.'[9]

The District Council

Under the Sixth Schedule the district councils would have the power to legislate on: (1) the allotment, occupation or use, or the setting apart, of land, other than that of the state's reserved forests, for the purpose of agriculture, grazing or other purposes in the interests of the inhabitants of any village, subject to the Assam government's power to acquire land for public purposes; (2) the management of unreserved forests; (3) the use of any canal or water course for agricultural purpose; (4) the regulation of shifting cultivation; (5) the establishment of village and town committees; (6) the appointment or succession of chiefs or headmen; (7) marriage; and (8) social customs. Such laws would require the Governor's assent. The executive powers of the district council extended to the construction and management of primary schools, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads and waterways in the district and to the prescription of the medium and manner of primary education. The district council had no legislative or regulatory power over the latter subjects. It could set up village councils or village courts and appellate courts for the trial of cases between parties all of whom belonged to scheduled tribes of the areas, but not involving offences punishable by death, transportation for life, or imprisonment for not less than five years. The regional councils that would be set up within the autonomous districts would also have the same powers, excluding the powers of the district council in those respects. The district council had also the power to regulate moneylending and trading by non-tribals within the district.

The district and regional councils were also given mutually exclusive powers on land revenue and toll on land and buildings within their respective jurisdictions. But the district councils had the concurrent power on the taxes on profession, trades, callings, employments, animals, boats, entry of goods into a market for sale therein, tolls on passengers and goods carried

in ferries and maintenance of schools, dispensaries or roads. This was bound to lead to conflicts, for regional councils would meet resistance against double taxation from a population not used to paying many taxes. In fact, one of the major grievances of the Pawi–Lakher Regional Council against the Mizo District Council was on this issue. The royalty on the mines, shared with the state government, went to the district council alone.

In 1952 district councils were elected, according to rules laid down by Government of Assam, in the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District, the Garo Hills District, the Lushai (Mizo) Hills District, the Mikir Hills District and the North Cachar Hills District. However, the last two 'autonomous districts' were united into an 'administrative district' according to clause 3 of the Assam United District of Mikir and North Cachar Hills (Administration) Regulation of 1951.[10] The Pawi–Lakher Regional Council was constituted within the Lushai District in 1953.

The working of the Sixth Schedule came under fire quite early. In 1960, the committee appointed by the Governor of Assam to examine the financial conditions and working of each district and regional council reported that 'the financial condition of most of the District Councils and of the Regional Council is not satisfactory.' The council suffered from an excess of clerical over field staff and even spent government subsidy meant for development purposes on administrative expenses. There was no adequate effort to increase revenue, no inspection of offices and coordination with the state government. There was a great deal of compartmentalisation in the council's offices, whereas the village councils were ineffective.[11]

In 1966, the Pataskar Commission found the performance of the councils generally unsatisfactory and regretted that no inquiry into their administration had been undertaken although there had been complaints about their unsatisfactory working. 'There were serious complaints against accounts of the Councils.' The achievements of the councils were no better than their working. The commission observed, 'In the sphere of social legislation these Councils have not gone beyond Christian marriages and divorces.'[12] 'The social customs of the people have not yet been codified,' though the Mizo District Council had made much progress in legislation. In the administrative sphere, 'their

activities have mostly been the establishment and management of the primary schools'. By 1 April 1964, the government primary schools were transferred to the council's management. 'Other constructive programmes undertaken by the council relate to local development work such as rural communications, rural water supply, construction of school buildings, etc...The performance, however, has not been satisfactory.'[13]

In the judicial sphere, 'the position is that only three district councils—the Garo Hills, the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills and the Mizo Hills have set up Courts at all levels: the North Cachar Hills District Council has set up only a district council court and a subordinate district council court but no village courts, and the Mikir Hills District Council has not yet taken over the administration of justice although it has enacted the Mikir Hills (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1954.'[14]

The rules for administration of justice of 1937, which continued to operate after the transfer of power, provided that the administration of a district was vested in the Governor of Assam, the commissioner, deputy commissioner and his assistants, and the traditional village authorities recognised by the government. When the Assam High Court was established in 1948, the judicial authority, except in the frontier tracts, of the Governor and the commissioner was transferred to that court. The Sixth Schedule, in paragraph 2, sub-paragraph 4, vested the administration of justice in the district and the regional councils, except for certain kinds of civil and criminal disputes. Paragraph 4, sub-paragraph 4 of the Sixth Schedule earmarked the executive and legislative functions of the district and regional councils, and gave them the power to make rules regulating the constitution of village councils and courts and the powers to be exercised by them, their procedure and the procedure to be followed by any appellate body above them. Consequently, the district councils formulated their own rules for administration of justice within the limits of the rules formulated by the Governor. The Sixth Schedule thus created two sets of authorities not clearly distinguished. In the administrative sphere, the deputy commissioners had no *locus standi* in the district councils, and they could exercise authority in the autonomous districts only to the extent that the district councils did not. The deputy commissioner's former appellate judicial authority was lost.[15]

On 25 January 1950, the Governor of Assam, in exercise of the extraprovincial jurisdiction of the Government of India as delegated to him, issued the Khasi Siemships (Administration of Justice) Order of 1950 which, in clause 1-A, defined the siem as 'the customary head of the Khasi tribal institution of an administrative area of the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District known as Khasi State prior to the commencement of the Constitution of India recognised as such by the Governor of Assam and includes Sirdar, Lyngdoh or Wahadadar, as the case may be.' A 'court of the *siem*' was defined as a court established under the customary law of the Khasi siemship and recognised as such by the Governor of Assam.

According to the Sixth Schedule the appointment and succession of chiefs became a power of the district council. The social customs having come under the powers of the district and regional councils, the siem in no time turned into a subordinate of the district council. In the Jormanik siem's case, the Supreme Court confirmed that the siem was an official of the district council.[16] The district council conferred the status of an additional district council court on the siem's durbar. Besides this judicial authority, delegated by the district council, the siem owned some customary rights over the clan lands, the unreserved forests belonging to the clan, and the markets. Frequent accusations against the siems, of appropriating substantial parts of their revenues, meanwhile led to litigation. In no time, the conflict between the district council and the chiefs became the central feature of Khasi politics.

The district council in the Khasi hills, as a result, failed to frame rules for constituting the village councils. The village heads in the 'state' areas receive sanads from the siems even now. In the other autonomous districts, however, such rules have been framed and the district council nominally exercises the power of 'appointing' the village authorities. Such appointments, being lucrative, often go to wealthy people rather than the traditional leaders.[17]

At the other extreme, in the Mizo hills (now Mizoram) chiefship was altogether abolished and the village councils were democratised. Subsequently all the hill areas other than the Khasi (in Meghalaya) and the Karbi and North Cachar Districts (in Assam) had village councils according to rules framed by the

district councils/states. In some of them a compromise has been reached with the 'traditional' leaders. These village councils are elected/chosen according to the 'customary' practices.

What was Wrong with the Sixth Schedule

The district councils were never favoured by the 'traditional' authorities in the hills. Towards the end of the British Raj, organisations like the tribal councils, the Lushai District Conference and the Federation of Khasi Siems had come into being with official blessings. The emerging middle class on the other hand sought the fulfilment of its aspirations through organisations like the Khasi National Conference, the Garo National Conference and the Mizo Union. The paradox of the Naga National Council was that it was born out of the Naga District Tribal Council, and not by uprooting it. The middle class youth which took over its leadership soon left the organisation to the extremist leadership of Phizo, who converted the Naga National Council into a central organisation of the 'traditional' authorities. The district council reflected the aspirations of the new elite. Phizo rejected the district council and virtually ran his organisation as a parallel government. The tolls and levies collected by the village authorities were shared with the Naga National Council until such collection/sharing was stopped in 1953 by a government order.[18] The district councils could perhaps have gone a long way in bringing about more social dynamism if:

1. The Sixth Schedule had fulfilled at least a part of the people's *political* aspirations aroused since the end of the Second World War;[19]
2. They had been ready to utilise sincerely the limited opportunity development afforded by the Sixth Schedule;
3. They had been ready to meet the challenge of vested interests that soon ranged against the district council.

These conditions were partly satisfied only in the Mizo District where the district council worked for some time with some success. In all other autonomous districts compromises

were made with the 'traditional' institutions and everywhere they failed in a general way. This created problems in all the hill districts where public awareness was high enough to generate resentment. A partial endorsement of the view that the demand for a hill state was a somewhat opportunistic device to divert popular resentment against the remote 'Assamese-dominated state government' is, therefore, unavoidable in all fairness. The typical example of such compromises is indeed the Khasi hills, where the district council had to concede much of the 'traditional' rights of the siems, at least of the influential ones, and had to pay dearly for it.

Thus, in 1953 the UK–J Hills District Council adopted all the laws then in force in the state of Assam under the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886, but hardly enforced them, with the result that though the district council obtained house tax and land revenue from the Jaintia area, in the Khasi area proper, such collection could not be made. Control over the land remained with the siems and headmen. In 1953 the district council also brought all the markets of the district under its control, and the four kinds of markets – under private ownership, siemship, doloiship and sirdarship – were made to pay half their revenue to the district council. By an amending Act (Act II of 1957), the obligation for payment on all markets other than the private ones was abolished. In practice, those markets pay to the district council only an eighth of their revenue. The Jaintia markets are privately owned and pay 50 per cent of their income. There was no effective check and control over the siemship markets, with the result that though income from the Jaintia markets was over Rs 2 lakh, that from the Khasi markets was only about Rs 10,000 a year.

Revenue from the grazing lands in Jaintia came mostly to the district council, whereas that from the Khasi hills went to the siems.

Though the Management and Control of Forests Act of 1958 received the Governor's assent in January 1959, the Act relating to the realisation of revenues from forest products entering Shillong and the registration of private forests could not be enforced due to opposition from the siems.

When the district council tried to introduce house tax in the Khasi hills, it failed due to opposition from the Khasi

states. Their only alternative was to exempt house tax in the Jaintia hills. In 1963 the Government of Assam appointed a commission to consider the splitting of the UK–J District. Though the commission observed 'in fairness to the District Council' that 'the difference in administration which has now been discriminatory on the part of the District Council, has been primarily a legacy from the British times', it had to recommend the separation of the Jaintia hills from the Khasi hills—mainly on 'administrative ground'.[20] The separation came in 1966 much to the satisfaction of the Congress and chagrin of the All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC). They were administratively separated in 1972.

The state government on its part did not play its cards well. Under the Sixth Schedule, a maximum of one-fourth of the strength of the district council could be nominated by the state government. The purpose was to give representation to the minorities. The permission was frequently abused for narrow party gains. As late as 1970 the Congress formed the Mizo District Council executive committee with the help of two nominated members. The district councils were not taken into confidence in the developmental planning for the hills, though the commission on the hill areas of Assam noted that the per capita expenditure in the hill districts was 'much more' than that in the plains.[21] Any suggestion of 'discriminatory treatment' of the hill areas would indeed be patently wrong. Economic planning in Assam has perhaps been the worst in the whole of India. No observer of Assam's economy would fail to note that economic development in Assam has mainly meant the building of government houses. During the first three five-year plans the only major industry that was developed in the state was oil – and that too by the Government of India. The Pataskar Commission was therefore justified in observing that, 'There is no evidence of any deliberate neglect of the hill areas in the matter of development, nor has there been any diversion of funds allocated to the hill areas for the benefit of the plains.'[22] Payment by the state government of the district council's share of revenue from mining leases and motor vehicles tax was indeed delayed almost regularly – but no dispute between the two on these shares has ever been referred to the Governor, who has the power to arbitrate on such disputes. But as the

Pataskar Commission observed, 'The exceptional difficulties of these districts justify exceptional treatment.'[23] It was according to this exceptional treatment that the government failed. The Pataskar Commission showed that the financial assistance of the central government to Manipur, Nagaland and NEFA was more generous than that to the Assam hills.[24]

The Meaning of Autonomy

There was a clear paradox in the working of the district councils. As they failed to utilise their socioeconomic potentialities, their attention was diverted to politics and the pretensions of mini-states. Some of the legislations passed by them were challenged in and invalidated by the High Court of Assam and Nagaland. Thus, the Trading by Non-Tribals Act passed by the Mizo District Council was turned down on grounds of violation of the right to equality. In 1968 the High Court turned down the main Section (Section 3) of the United Khasi–Jaintia (Transfer of Land) Act of 1953, which restricted sale of lands to non-tribals. The High Court found the Act discriminatory between the 'tribal' and the 'non-tribal', going beyond the legislative competence of the district council and conferring unlimited discretionary power on the district executive committee. The first verdict was not fought in the Supreme Court, but the second was; the Supreme Court upheld the High Court judgement on the ground of incompetence of the district council,[25] refusing to go into the other questions. The district council argued that on a wide construction of the district council's power over 'allotment, occupation or use or setting apart of land', it had the power to regulate the 'transfer of land'. The Supreme Court said that wide construction was not permissible because the district councils had no 'plenary legislative power'. Earlier in T. Cajee's case and Edwingson Bareh's case[26] the Supreme Court had held that paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule conferred a kind of legislative power on the district council.[27]

The Supreme Court has not yet dealt with the question of equality in the few judgements it has passed on the district council. The question is of some political significance, for the hill people regard the Sixth Schedule as their special safeguard. The

point of equality before the law does not fit into its framework. What purpose will be served by the Sixth Schedule if the plains people and the hill people are treated at par in respect of trade and land acquisition? Was not the Bardoloi subcommittee seeking to protect the hill people's land and meagre wealth from unscrupulous plains people?

At least once, the judicial autonomy of the hill areas itself was doubted in the High Court. The area was Nagaland which is not an autonomous district but whose special position is protected by Article 371-A of the Constitution. The occasion was thus: On receipt of a report that on or about 2 August 1964, seven hostile Nagas, who had been kept prisoner at the Central Reserve Police camp at Pfutsir, were murdered and their bodies secretly disposed of. The Nagaland police, after investigation, arrested 44 of the camp's men under several charges including those of murder and setting fire to some houses in a village. When the trial was about to take place in the court of the additional deputy commissioner at Kohima, an objection was put up to the effect that the trial could be held only in the sessions court according to the Criminal Procedure Code. The objection was overruled as there was no court of session in the Naga hills and the Code was not applicable. The respondents moved the High Court of Assam and Nagaland under Article 226 of the Constitution of India and a division bench of the court allowed the appeal. While one judge held that the rules for administration of justice in the Naga hills, framed in 1874, 1906 and 1937, were partly invalid and partly infructuous, the other held that the rules of 1937 were void *ab initio* and that the Governor of Assam did not have the authority to issue them. And, if such authority had existed, it had lapsed in 1937 with the repeal of the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874, and the continuation of such rules restricting the judicial procedure was discriminatory. After an elaborate examination of these arguments, however, the Supreme Court held that 'the Rules of 1937 continue to be in force and govern the trial of these respondents. The Code of Criminal Procedure admittedly does not apply there and the Additional Deputy Commissioner was therefore right in holding the trial under the Rules of 1937.'[28]

Tribal Justice

The system of 'tribal justice' is a fascinating subject for social scientists. In the hill areas of eastern India, the Codes of Civil Procedure and Criminal Procedure have not yet been applied, though the Indian Penal Code has a modified application. The Pataskar Commission was told by some of the chief executive members of the district councils that 'if there was complete separation of executive and judiciary there should be no objection to the entire judicial administration being transferred to the regular courts subordinate to the High Court, thereby giving a uniform system of judicial administration to the whole State including the hill districts.'[29] Of course, judicial autonomy of the hills is often abused. Money has corrupted much of the unsophisticated attitudes of the hill people. Oaths are nowadays not always reliable. Influence can lead to misinterpretation of custom. It is therefore desirable, they say, that the hills be brought under a uniform system of justice. In the Nagaland case the Supreme Court suggested the formulation of 'one uniform set of rules for the whole of this area'. But there are almost insurmountable difficulties in bringing about this judicial uniformity. The personal laws of the minorities in India are inviolable according to the Constitution. Ordinary courts of justice may indeed protect them, provided the laws are codified and uniformly interpreted. The difficulty arises out of the fact that, except in the Khasi hills, nowhere have the customary laws been codified. Even the Khasi laws that were partially codified by the Khasi National Durbar in 1925 and which served as the basis of Cantlie's *Khasi Law* have not been found uniformly applicable and are objected to by the articulate non-Christians.[30]

Application of the all-India codes is also likely to create problems. Trial with a lawyer's aid is prohibitively expensive for most hill people. Their concepts of injury, defamation and compensation cannot be coped with by the all-India codes. Problems will also be immense for the administration. For instance, the Kuki's migratory character made the Manipur government in 1928 ban the establishment of new Kuki villages with less than ten households. Any violation of the order had to be punished by eviction, if necessary by burning the huts – a

self-defeating punishment. The protection of the Indian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code has made this ban impossible to enforce, with the result that Kuki villages are spreading uneconomically and damaging the valuable reserved forests. On the other hand, such Codes may take away much of the beauty of tribal life. Many of the disputes are still sought to be solved outside the courts – at the clan level. Codification will naturally encourage litigation. The most interesting thing about the Nagaland case (cited earlier) happened outside the court. When the Supreme Court declared that the additional deputy commissioner was competent to try the suit, the respondents moved for 'mercy', which was granted. Compensation in financial terms was offered but the Nagas refused to qualify 'mercy'. Acceptance of compensation, under 'tribal' laws, amounted to conviction. (The Indian government reportedly meted out punishment to the offenders.)

Notes and References

1 See B. Shiva Rao, The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents, vol. III.
2 B. Shiva Rao, op. cit., p. 781.
3 B. Shiva Rao, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 411.
4 Ibid., pp. 409–10.
5 Ibid., pp. 391–92.
6 The UK–J Hills District Council was split in 1966. The notification of seperate names through an amendment was issued only on 14 June 1973, by the Government of Meghalaya.
7 6 September 1949, see *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. IX.
8 *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. VII, p. 327.
9 *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. IX, p. 1024. Nichols-Roy in his Personal Memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission expressed strong resentment against the changes.
10 The Mikir and north Cachar hills were put in one administrative district in 1951.
11 *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Governor of Assam to Examine the Financial Conditions etc., of Each District/Regional Council*, Shillong, 1966, pp. 56–68.
12 *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965–66*, (Pataskar Commission), Delhi, 1966, pp. 64–66.
13 Ibid., pp. 64–65.

14 Ibid., p. 101.

15 Robbins Burling, for instance, found in 1956 no clear distinction between the deputy commissioner's court and the district council court vide *Renganggri*, p. 244.

16 *Vide T. Cajee* v. *Jormanik Siem*, AIR (1961), SC 276 : The case and the Supreme Court judgment, in short, were: Jormanik Siem was elected siem of Mylliem by the Myntries in 1951. On 6 March 1951, the Governor of Assam appointed him to the post subject to his confirmation by the district council, when it would be formed. Later, the United Khasi–Jaintia District Council in a letter dated 4 April 1953 conveyed its approval of the appointment subject to his observance of certain terms. In July 1959, the district council decided to remove him upon certain charges. Jormanik moved the High Court of Assam which turned down the order of the district council on the ground that the appointment and succession of the siem were never intended to be the district council's administrative function. The district council could only act in the matter by making a law with the assent of the Governor and not by passing orders in exercise of its administrative functions.

The Supreme Court overruled the High Court on the ground that the Khasi siemships were merged with India by the Constitution Act of 1950; and 'any power of the Chiefs, so far as administration was concerned, came to an end'. Such administrative authorities, according to Article 244(2) and the Sixth Schedule, would be exercised by the district councils.

17 As early as 1934, Cantlie (*The Khasi Law*, p. 247) reported the widespread use of money in the siemship elections. In the fifties, Robbins Burling (*Rengsanggri*, pp. 244–46) noted that in the Garo hills bribes were occasionally offered in exchange for offices in the village councils.

18 *The Hindustan Times*, 28 May 1953, report on Naga hills.

19 The PataskarCommission Report (p. 65) observed: 'One of the purposes of the Sixth Schedule was to allow the tribal people to administer themselves in all matters of vital local concern and to save them from an administration that was both expensive and remote. The tendency of the Councils has, on the other hand, been to substitute this traditional system of administration by something far more akin to the full-fledged democratic apparatus of Government elsewhere.'

20 *Report of the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Commission*, Shillong, 1964.

21 Pataskar Report, p. 125.

22 Ibid., p. 125.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Civil Appeals Nos. 1546 and 1547 of 1968.
26 AIR 1966, SC 1220.
27 In December 1971, however, a legislation to regulate the sale and transfer of land within the autonomous districts of Meghalaya received the President's assent. Subsequently, the law was extended to the municipal area of Shillong.
28 *Ratan Singh* v. *the State of Nagaland*, AIR 1967, SC 212.
29 Pataskar *Report*, pp. 102–103.
30 In any case, land settlement has become an imperative necessity in the hill areas. A recent survey calls the land system in the Khasi hills 'peculiar' and 'primitive'. See State Bank of India, Lead Bank Scheme, *Survey Report on United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, Meghalaya, December 1970* (cyclostyled).

CHAPTER 7

The Hill State

An important point frequently missed by casual observers of the hill situation is that *political leadership* in the hills today belongs to an emerging middle class whose aspirations have not been fulfilled. A section of it, due to initial association with the British Raj, did not favour identification with independent India. But with the passing of time, more and more people are veering round to the idea of a common fate with India and are even working out new alignments. Such alignments most probably depend upon the conflict developing between the emerging middle class and the decadent traditional leadership. One instance may be cited to give an idea of the intensity of this conflict. In 1947, when Bardoloi promised the Mizo Union the support of the Congress towards the abolition of chiefships, the former became an associate of the Congress. Whereas chiefship was abolished in the Mizo District in 1955–56, in the other districts the district councils had to satisfy themselves only with the power to regulate the appointment and succession of chiefs, who occasionally resented the encroachment of the district councils on their 'traditional rights' and began to enter politics to resist it. It has already been pointed out that British administration functioned primarily through the traditional chiefs, the statutory recognition of whom created vested interests. This author's conclusion is that separatist demands, wherever they have been raised, have been sponsored by the powerful class of officers and by the chiefs. The outstanding aspect of the hills problem is political, the economic foundations of which can be traced not only to the hill people's long-standing grievances but also to their aspirations for a new destiny. In short, *the hills problem is a problem of growth* which, under special circumstances, has been articulated in political movements.

The promulgation of the Constitution of India polarised the political forces in the districts. One of the reasons why hill politics became district oriented was that the district councils

became the bones of contention immediately after Independence. On 20 February 1950, the Naga National Council under the presidency of Phizo decided to organise a plebiscite on the question of being independent or remaining in India. On 16 May 1951 it was inaugurated. The underground claimed that on the first day 7000 Nagas gave their thumb-print. The campaign went on until August. All the villages were visited by the NNC to collect thumb-prints and signatures and to solicit oaths from the villagers on the issue.[1] The thumb-prints in two volumes, claimed to be those of almost all the Nagas, were sent to the President of India through the Government of Assam which of course did not recognise the plebiscite. But the NNC showed a remarkable organising ability through a total boycott of the general election of 1952 in which the Naga district was allotted three seats in the Assam Assembly. The stage was all set for the elections, but not a single nomination paper was submitted and not a single vote was cast. In those circumstances there could be no talk of a district council.

On the day the United Khasi–Jaintia District Council was inaugurated,[2] there was a big student and youth demonstration led by Hoover Hynniewta, a militant Khasi graduate, against the district council that was under the control of Nichols-Roy, a minister of Assam. Meanwhile, MacDonald Khar-Kongor had died and Joab Solomon, an ally of Nichols-Roy, was leading the Khasi National Durbar as its vice-president. In September 1952, there was a 'coup' (to quote Hynniewta) in the Khasi National Durbar, once the fortress of the siems and now practically defunct. The durbar was reorganised with Wilson Reade, a close relative of the siem of Khyriem, as president and Hoover Hynniewta as secretary. The first thing the durbar did was to submit a memorandum to Nehru, during his visit to Shillong on 19 October 1952, demanding the abolition of the system of nomination to the district council, the Governor's automatic assent to the laws passed by the district councils, the full inclusion of Shillong in the United Khasi–Jaintia Autonomous District and stoppage of the grant of mining rights by the Assam government which had allegedly appropriated a large part of the district revenues. Nehru's attention was drawn to the extreme poverty of the people on the Khasi hills' border with Pakistan and opposition was expressed to the Assamese language. For

the first time a specific demand for the unification of all Assam hills under one administration was raised in the memorandum. For the first time also, the Khasi National Durbar was formally politicised, with the complete departure of the Nichols-Roy faction and ascendancy of the siems.

In the 1952 elections, the Congress could contest and secure only the two seats in the Mikir hills and the Assembly seat of Shillong where Nichols-Roy defeated the Khasi–Jaintia Durbar candidate, G. G. Swell. In the Mizo hills all three seats went to the Mizo Union which started functioning as an associate of the Congress. In the following years, however, the Congress plunged into a reckless game of winning over a number of independents mostly by offers of ministerial office. This kind of personal politics soon became characteristic of Congress tactics in the hills. Most of the MLAs who joined the Congress were politically ruined.

In a short time, the Congress made its greatest mistake by alienating that stalwart, Nichols-Roy, who was accused of using his office for the purpose of proselytising among the Khasi. The real causes of the conflict appear to have been: (1) the persistent refusal of Medhi to allot the Department of Tribal Affairs to Nichols-Roy, and (2) the allotment of a coal-mining lease at Cherrapunji to a firm from outside, while denying it to the small Khasi businessmen who had organised cooperative societies to take up the trade.[3]

The SRC in Assam

In the wake of the appointment of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC), regional aspirations began to emerge. A brief reference to Assam politics would not be out of place here. Culturally, Assam offers a composite picture with the Hindu aristocracy comprising the Brahmin and the Kalita castes, assumed to be immigrants from north India,[4] in possession of most of the agricultural lands outside the districts of Sylhet and Goalpara. These two districts were dominated by Bengali speaking people. Of them, the Muslims of Goalpara have shown greater adaptability to Assamese culture, and had registered themselves as Assamese in the 1961 census. Until 1874 Assam

was attached to the Bengal administration. Ever since the American Baptist Mission opened the first Assamese press in 1836, a demand for the introduction of Assamese gained momentum but was accepted only in 1872. A predominantly agri- cultural people with rich and vast areas of lands, the Assamese gentry in the early British period were not keen on government jobs, which were grabbed mostly by outsiders who swelled in number after partition. About the time of the transfer of power, most of the junior government services were in the possession of Bengali speaking people. The tea garden labourers were almost entirely non-Assamese and a steady inflow of Muslims from East Bengal had created an acute scarcity of land in Assam. The consequent parochial reaction was so high that when the partition of India was decided upon, Ambikagiri Roy Choudhuri, secretary of the Asom Jatiya Mahasobha (Assam National Conference), declared:

> It is our definite opinion that whatever sense there has been in retaining Sylhet as a whole in Assam, there is no justification whatsoever in the Cachar and Sylhet leaders trying to retain a few Hindu-majority *thanas* of the district within Assam. There is little cause in trying to retain the junior partner of Sylhet – the Cachar plains, at any rate the Hailskandi Sub-Division, in Assam.[5]

On 23 July 1947, *The Assam Tribune* endorsed this statement. Earlier on July 17, it had suggested the transfer of four thanas of Dhubri Subdivision (that were Bengali speaking) to Pakistan. The Asom Jatiya Mahasobha's Kamrup district branch suggested on 1 January 1948 that Assam should come out of the Indian Union and become an independent state like Burma.[6] On January 3, Ambikagiri Roy Choudhuri sent a wire to the president of the Naga National Council, conveying the Mahasobha's full support to the Naga stand for self-determination. On 19 April 1948, *The Assam Tribune* editorial said, 'Assam does not want unity'.[7]

The Sixth Schedule and the administrative separation of the frontier tracts created more bad blood. Assamese–Bengali riots started haunting the province. In early 1954, a Cachar States Reorganisation Commission was set up. In a strongly worded memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission, it

declared that, 'with the Cachar and Lushai Hills districts in despair under Assam, with the Nagas in revolt and effectively defying Assam's authority in every sphere, with Manipur and Tripura refusing to be the *Cinderellas* in a State...the only positive course left open to the Commission is, in our view, to suggest a separate administrative unit for these areas'.[8] The Purbachal state – as the proposed state was called – would also cover NEFA and be 'a heterogeneous one' with two divisions: (1) Cachar, Tripura, the Lushai hills and Manipur in one, and (2) NEFA and Nagaland in the other. The idea, smacking of a kind of Bengali dominance, could not appeal to the hill people. Tripura and Manipur demanded full statehood.

Response of the Hills

The chief executive member(CEM) of the Garo Hills District Council, Williamson A. Sangma, convened a meeting of the chief executive members of all district councils, 'to discuss things of mutual interests.' It was held at Shillong on 16 and 17 June 1954, and was attended by the chief executive members of the Lushai, North Cachar, Garo and the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District Councils. The CEM of the Mikir Hills District Council could not attend it due to transport difficulties. B.M.Roy, who had meanwhile become the chief executive member of the UK–J Hills District Council, after outvoting the previous pro-Nichols-Roy CEM, took the chair at the conference and opened the proceedings thus:

> From the number of points for discussion proposed and submitted separately by you and by us, I find – wrongly or rightly – that they can conveniently be reduced to and covered by two common points of supreme importance and those points are: (1) Formation of a separate Hills State and (2) Amendment of the Sixth Schedule, which, evidently, you all have found out by experience does not fully satisfy us because it confers no real autonomy...

Sangma spoke first. The Sixth Schedule, he held, had many loopholes and did not safeguard the interests of the hill people adequately. The attitude of the plains people was also not conducive to unity. He cited a resolution of the Asom Jatiya

Mahasobha, taken shortly before, to the effect that the areas opposed to Assamese as a state language should be severed from Assam. If this was the attitude of the plains people there was no alternative to demanding a hill state. Lalsawia of the Mizo District Council (controlled by the Mizo Union), on the other hand, stressed that the demand for a separate state could be advanced only after the demand for greater autonomy of the district councils had been put up and rejected. He was supported by Khotlang, CEM of the North Cachar District Council. In the end, a somewhat vague memorandum was drafted, stressing that 'in the working of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, the people have felt that this autonomy is very defective...The younger generation especially are feeling very unhappy and they see that they will, in time, be extinct. The fear of their future destiny naturally makes them feel that it will be far better for them to have a Hill State of their own.' The memorandum offered the comment that under the existing set-up the hill people disliked the Congress, but they would welcome 'good all-India Organisations' including the Congress, after forming a hill state covering the six autonomous districts. At the same time, a set of suggestions for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule was sent to members of parliament. B. M. Roy expressed satisfaction at the achievement of the unity of the hills.[9]

The next step was an Assam Hills Tribal Leaders' Conference held at Tura, in the Garo hills, from 6 to 8 October 1954. At the meeting 46 delegates were present. They came from all except the Mizo hills. The president of the United Mizo Freedom Organisation sent some suggestions. The CEM of north Cachar did not turn up; but J. B. Hagjer, an independent MLA attented. On October 6, the conference unanimously called for, 'a separate State for the Autonomous Districts of Assam', and decided that a memorandum be submitted to the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC). On the next day, it 'decided that the proposed amendments in the Sixth Schedule sent to Parliament by the last Chief Executive Members' Conference at Shillong be left as they are but those submitted to the State Reorganisation Commission be withdrawn.' It was decided that the CEMs' memorandum to the SRC was not to be made available for circulation. The solidarity of the Assam hills, that had elated B. M. Roy, had obviously cracked. It was decided that a fresh

meeting of the CEMs would be urgently summoned at Shillong to consider the hill state demand.[10] That meeting does not appear to have been held. An appeal was sent to leaders of all tribal organisations and parties of the autonomous districts to sign the memorandum adopted at the conference, pressing for a hill state. The appeal met with a cold response in many districts. The SRC while rejecting the demand observed:

> Generally speaking, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and the Lushai Hills are not in favour of a separate hill state and the district council in the Lushai Hills and the Karbia Durbar (Mikir National Council) are in favour of the *status quo*. The agitation in favour of a hill state is, therefore, confined virtually to the Garo and Khasi and Jaintia Hills.[11]

The Assam Hill Tribal Leaders' Conference had decided to form a Hills Tribal Union after the tour of the SRC, and elected an *ad hoc* committee with Sangma as chairman and B. B. Lyngdoh as secretary. The other members of the committee were A. S. Khongpai, W. Reade, B. M. Pugh, J. B. Hagjer and B. M. Roy. B. M. Roy was empowered to act as president when Sangma was not available. All the members except Sangma (a Garo) and Hagjer (a Kachari) were Khasi. The chairman clarified that all the hill tribal organisations would continue to exist and would be given representation in the committee. The organisations might be dissolved after the Hills Tribal Union was properly constituted following the SRC's inquiry.[12]

An interesting sidelight was Nichols-Roy's presence at the Tura conference. Nichols-Roy had gone to Tura to attend to 'some of my government duties' and to find out what the hill leaders were going to decide. Nichols-Roy gave his support to the hill state demand after it had been raised in his absence, for he felt that 'the feeling for a separate hill state is spontaneous.'[13] However, one of the reasons for deferring the formation of the Hills Tribal Union was the opposition of Nichols-Roy who was still 'vacillating'. On 2 June 1955, there was an interesting discussion in Shillong between some Khasi politicians, including Nichols-Roy and B. B. Lyngdoh, and a Naga delegation led by Phizo, in which Nichols-Roy told the Naga delegates that the Nagas had suffered by rejecting the Sixth Schedule. The Nagas

replied that the Khasi leaders were wrong in demanding a hill state within India. Phizo's comment during the discussion is most interesting:

> I feel, the Hill State demand has already achieved its mission. It has shaken the Assamese. In politics it is not mere majority but a matter of organization...If one day we achieve independence, it will not mean that India granted it, it will be because India can no longer stand against the voice of the world. You can help us much in this matter by speaking about us to the many tourists. If we come down, it will not be helpful to you.[14]

Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU)

The rejection of the hill state demand by the SRC was, however, not compensated for by the enlargement of the powers of the district councils. On 28 August 1955, when Prime Minister Nehru visited Shillong, a deputation of hill leaders met him to stress that the hill people were 'primarily concerned with the social and economic development' in the hills. The economic backwardness of the people created a fear complex and suspicion in them, which could be removed by the formation of an eastern hill state. Imposition of Assamese would mean too many languages for schoolchildren. The deputation advocated Hindi as the regional language of Assam to solve this. They alleged that the emphasis on development was confined to the plains, as was seen by the absence of any hill person in the delegation of the Assam government to Delhi to discuss the Second Five Year Plan. They wanted more opportunities in the hills for technical education, social service and the learning of Hindi, and demanded a separate public works department for them.[15] Nehru appealed to the delegation for calm and dispassionate consideration of the SRC *Report*.

From 26 to 28 October 1955, another conference of hill leaders was held at Aijal in Mizo District. Nichols-Roy was of course absent. Some members of the district council of the north Cachar hills and the Karbia Durbar of the Mikir hills, including Chhatra Singh Teron (who later joined the Congress and became a minister of Assam), attended it. The conference was hosted by

the Mizo Union, the party in control of the district council which, however, refused to merge itself with the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) that was born at Aijal. Before setting up the EITU, the conference expressed 'grave concern' at the SRC's inability 'to appreciate the aspiration and demand of the tribal people of this part of the country' and again called for the bringing of all the hills under one administration.[16] On 1 November 1955, a memorandum was submitted to the Home Minister, G. B. Pant, who was visiting Shillong.

Hill politics on the eve of the 1957 elections was complex. In 1956 Nichols-Roy left the Congress and the government. He started bargaining with the EITU for seats in the second general election. Failing in this, he tried to revive his old party, the Khasi–Jaintia National Conference, while B. B. Lyngdoh, his one-time follower, left the secretaryship of the EITU to join him. Nichols-Roy won his home constituency of Cherrapunji as an independent, defeating his nearest EITU rival by a margin of 188 votes and a rich Congressman by a bigger margin. Theodore Cajee, a retired government servant (Khasi), became the EITU secretary. Sangma, the vice-president of the EITU, declined to merge his Garo National Council (GNC) with it. The Garo National Council and the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) fought the second general election in their own names, the EITU being confined to the Khasi–Jaintia hills. The Mizo Union was split and the Mizo Union (Right Wing) walked out of it, as a result of which the UMFO won two seats and the Mizo Union one, in the Mizo hills. The Congress lost all seats in the UK–J hills of which three went to the EITU and two to independents. The Garo National Council won three of the four seats in the Garo hills, one of the two seats in the Mikir hills and the only seat in north Cachar. Among the Congress casualties were two new Congressmen, Hagjer and Swell, from north Cachar and Shillong respectively. The Congress was never able to win the parliamentary seat reserved for the autonomous districts.

The sad plight of the Congress in the 1957 elections gave impetus to the hills movement. At the fifth conference at Tura (30 May to 1 June 1957) B. M. Pugh, a retired Khasi agricultural scientist, replaced B. M. Roy as president of the EITU. A fresh bid was made to reorganise the EITU on the basis of a 'merger' of all the district parties, and anticipating an all-India platform,

for which the conference decided to contact Jaipal Singh, the well known 'tribal' leader. In spite of such an ambitious plan, what the conference had in mind was an amalgamation of the EITU (which was then virtually a district party of the Khasi–Jaintia hills), Nichols-Roy's Khasi–Jaintia National Conference, the Garo National Council, the United Mizo Freedom Organisation, the Mizo Union and the Mizo Union (Right Wing), the breakway group of the Mizo Union. The UMFO leader, Lalmawia, was asked by a resolution to visit the north Cachar Hills to build a district unit of the EITU there in collaboration with Hamdhan Mohan Haflongbar, the independent MLA from the north Cachar hills who had defeated J.B. Hagjer in the 1957 elections. The conference asked the EITU member of parliament, Hoover Hynniewta, to move Parliament for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule, while repeating the hill state demand.[17] Yet, the EITU being in origin the Khasi National Durbar, could not attract the Nichols-Roy group. The Garo National Conference and the Mizo Union also kept away from the siem-backed party. The UMFO and the Mizo Union (Right Wing) were soon to die a natural death.

The 1957 elections also moved the central leadership of the Congress. The hill leaders claim that, 'after the elections the Union Home Minister, the late Govind Ballabh Pant, visited Shillong to request the leaders of the hills and plains to remain together, and to evolve some administrative arrangement at the State level. Sri Bishnuram Medhi was then replaced as Chief Minister of Assam by Sri Bimala Prasad Chaliha... subsequently, the late Prime Minsiter, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru succeeded in persuading the EITU to agree to participate in this administrative arrangement of the Government of Sri Chaliha. According to this arrangement Captain Williamson Sangma, leader of the Hills Block in the Assembly, became a Cabinet Minister in charge of the Tribal Areas department and each autonomous district was represented in the Government by a Deputy Minsiter or a Parliamentary Secretary.'[18]

Earlier, due to factionalism in the state unit of the Congress, Chaliha had lost the Assembly election from his home constituency in the Sibsagar district and was returned only in a by-election from Badarpur, an entirely Bengali speaking and predominantly Muslim area. Of all the Assam leaders he

was singularly fortunate in commanding the confidence of the minorities in Assam, including the hill people. As president of the Assam Pradesh (Provincial) Congress Committee he earned great respect from all sections of the Naga. While Nichols-Roy was possibly willing to join the new cabinet,[19] at Chaliha's invitation Sangma joined it. Soon after, the ineffective Congress members of the hills accused Chaliha of patronising the EITU at the expense of the Congress.

Chaliha's approach was generally a success, except in the Mizo hills, where a grave mistake was committed. Chaliha's alliance with the EITU outraged the Mizo Union, the erstwhile friend of the Congress. Meanwhile the Mizo Union's image had been tarnished by allegations of favouritism in the distribution of pattas (agreement of grant) on land. In 1957, the Mizo Union's loss of two seats had created the wrong impression that it was a decadent force. In Chaliha's government one member of the UMFO became parliamentary secretary and the Mizo Union MLA got the position of chief parliamentary secretary. The Mizo Union was displeased with the inadequate reward for its consistent support to the Congress.

Crisis in the EITU

In the 1958 elections to the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District Council, the EITU got an overwhelming majority. Nichols-Roy was the only person to be elected to the district council from his National Conference which soon fell into disarray following the leader's death. B. M. Pugh became its chief executive member and Theodore Cajee another executive member. Meanwhile, Sangma's participation in the Chaliha cabinet, backed by Pugh, created bad blood in the EITU, and dissidence grew even in the Garo hills in the form of two organisations – the Nokma Association and the Achik Asongna Chalchikgipa (the Garo People's Welfare Party).

In 1959, a no-confidence motion was suddenly moved against the executive in the UK–J Hills District Council, and was passed. The new executive committee elected by the district council was headed by Theodore Cajee himself and backed by the Khasi National Durbar. Pugh, in his capacity as president of the EITU,

convened a meeting of its executive committee and suspended Cajee from the secretaryship of the party on 17 December 1959. As a result the UK–J Hills District Committee of the EITU expelled Pugh from primary membership of the party. With Sangma's backing, Pugh convened an annual conference of the EITU on 27 and 28 April 1960, and an all-Assam hill leaders' conference on 28 and 29 April 1960, at Tura.[20]

The agenda for the EITU conference included: (1) the review of the EITU's participation in the Assam government; (2) the amendment of the constitution of the EITU; (3) the future programme of the party; (4) the amendment of the Sixth Schedule; and (5) any other subject. The agenda for the All-Assam Hill Leaders' Conference included: (1) the official language of the State of Assam; (2) the amendment of the Sixth Schedule; (3) the approach to the Third Five Year Plan, with special reference to the backward classes; (4) the revision of the population order under Article 342 of the Constitution; (5) the representation of scheduled tribes in parliament; (6) the ensuing census; (7) the food situation in the Garo hills; (8) the eviction of refugees from the Garo hills; and (9) any other subject.[21] A hill state demand was nowhere on the agenda even though the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) had revived the idea of introducing Assamese as the state language. On 22 April 1960, the APCC passed a resolution demanding immediate introduction of Assamese.

The EITU conference of Pugh was unsuccessful, but the All-Assam Hill Leaders' Conference was attended by delegates from the UMFO, the GNC and the non-Congress Mikirs. The conference 'vehemently' opposed the APCC resolution on language, especially with reference to the hills, at the same time appreciating Chaliha's statement that any move in favour of the Assamese language should come from the non-Assamese. It demanded immediate revision of the Sixth Schedule, appreciated the Assam government's action in extending all economic and other facilities to the scheduled tribes throughout the state – facilities which they wanted from the Government of India for all the scheduled tribes of India. It demanded a new delimitation of the parliamentary constituency as under the existing system the Garo hills were clubbed with the Goalpara and Kamrup Districts, the Mizo hills with the Cachar plains and

the United Mikir and North Cachar District with the Naga hills, which had gone out of Assam. Concern was expressed over the famine conditions in the Mizo hills and prompt improvement of communications therein was demanded. The meeting supported the Mikir Hills District Council's eviction of refugees from East Bengal, who were damaging the reserved forests of the district council and demanded abolition of wealth tax and estate duty in the hills.[22]

Meanwhile, the opposite camp in the EITU was moving towards an extremist stance. In April 1958 Hoover Hynniewta, the MP from the Assam hills, strongly raised the demand for a hill state. The stage was set for a split in the hills movement before it was really organised. The Cajee group met at Aijal, from 2 to 4 June 1960, without Pugh, the Garo National Council, the United Mizo Freedom Organisation and the Mizo Union (Right Wing), but with the Mizo Union proper. R. Thanlira, a Mizo Union leader, took the chair and asked the delegates to consider the status of the conference first, 'in view of the fact that there was a meeting held in Tura in the last week of April 1960'. The delegates decided that the Aijal meeting was the proper conference, and the conference resolved that the Tura conference had been improperly convened as: (1) no proper notice had been sent to the United Khasi-Jaintia District Tribal Union to attend the 'so-called conference'; (2) the notice had been issued by Pugh not as president of the EITU but as convenor of the All-Assam Hill Leaders' Conference, (3) the convenors, without any jurisdiction or authority, had imposed restrictions on the district units' right to choose their delegates; and (4) the other political organisations had sent delegates to the meeting.

Cajee's suspension was disapproved of and the application of Pugh's expulsion by the district branch of the EITU, in order to maintain as far as possible the solidarity of the party, was kept in abeyance until a special conference of the party, which Pugh and Cajee were asked to convene jointly. It was stipulated that if Pugh did not cooperate in this, Cajee would himself call the conference on or before 15 June 1960. That even this conference was not perfectly united is seen from the resolutions entrusting the Mizo district branch of the EITU with the job of drafting proposals for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule, at the same

time taking grave note of 'the sinister move of the APCC and some sections of the Assamese speaking community to declare Assamese as the official language of Assam', which revealed the 'imperialistic ambition of the militant and dictatorial sections of the Assamese community.' The language of the resolution was guarded and the conference took note of the APCC's stipulation that Assamese would not be imposed on the hill districts and Cachar, though such a stipulation was ascribed to the APCC's realisation that any imposition would lead to an administrative breakdown. The conference merely declared that such moves by the 'militant' Assamese only 'strengthened the Hill State demand.'

If this account of the political developments in the Assam hills suggests any conclusion, it is this: except for the vested interests of the Khasi and Lushai chiefs and Phizo's personal arrogance, there was no basis for secessionism in the hill communities. The merger of the Khasi siemships with Assam and the introduction of the district council weakened the siems' strength, but made it necessary for them to control the district councils which were encroaching upon their 'traditional' rights. In the Mizo hills, however, chiefship was entirely abolished in 1955–56 following the passage of the Mizo Chiefship Abolition Act by the Assam Assembly in 1953. The payment of compensation to the dethroned Mizo chiefs, however, turned them into an upper middle class seeking new alignments in Assam politics. In the other hills, chiefship was never very powerful and various types of compromises were made between the emergent middle class generally controlling the district councils and the traditional chiefs, though occasional conflicts were not absent.

In such a complicated situation it was not surprising that political alignments were frequently changing, subject to the passing of power from one section to another. The hill state movement was not really born until the middle of 1960, when the hill parties were in real disarray. It was the language issue which helped them to unite on a common platform, following the outbreak of violence between the Assamese speaking and Bengali speaking communities in the Assam plains.

Crisis Averted

In June 1960 Sangma called a conference of the leaders of all the hill parties on 6 and 7 July 1960. The timing of the meeting was well calculated. Pugh had been told to convene a conference of the EITU by July 20. The Garo National Council was granted delegation to it on the condition that it would agree to turn itself into the district committee of the EITU. Sangma's personal position in the Garo hills had become increasingly threatened. The meeting pre-empted the EITU special conference, and the hill leaders' meeting in July 1960 was presided over by Pugh. The All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference was born. Even the District Congress Committees of the hill districts joined it. There the demand was made not for a hill state but for the dropping of the Language Bill which, according to the resolution, anticipated the imposition of Assamese on the grounds that:

(a) The position and conditions of the Hills people in Assam are such that the acceptance of the Assamese language, now or at any time, which would place the Assamese in a more dominant position, will lead to the assimilation of all the Hills people in the Assamese community, thereby gradually leading to the disintegration of their identity as distinct communities in India, which identity has been given recognition and protection under the Constitution.

(b) The imposition of the Assamese language will over-burden the Hills people with too many languages (Hindi, the Vernacular, English and Assamese) in different scripts.

(c) The adoption of Assamese as the official language of the State will adversely affect the opportunities and prospects of the Hills people in the Government services and other avocations notwithstanding any amount of safeguards which can always be circumvented.

(d) There is no justification for the declaration of Assamese as the official language even from the population point of view, as less than fifty per cent of the population have Assamese as the mother tongue.

(e) The move has already created discord, disruption and violence among the different language groups of the State, thereby defeating the very purpose which an official language is intended to serve.

(f) The imposition of the language by law will create more

chaos and insecurity in this frontier state, which will be catastrophic especially in view of the Chinese aggression (of 1959).

(g) Assam being India in miniature, inhabited by people of diverse races, cultures and languages, the proper official language should be Hindi. Meanwhile, English should continue as the official language until such time as the people of the state are ready to adopt Hindi as the official language.[23]

The first conference set up a Council of Action with representatives of the local parties and the Congress as members and a young Khasi representative of the newly formed Swatantra Party as its convener. Representatives of the council met the Prime Minister and submitted a memorandum to the President on 21 August 1960. But the state government was determined to see the Language Bill through the legislature. The second All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) met in Shillong on 22 and 23 August 1960, approved of the memorandum, and authorised the Council of Action 'to prepare a plan or pattern of separation, to submit the same to all Political Parties and District Councils in the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam and finally to present it before the third All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference for final approval.' The conference assured the non-tribal residents of the hills of the protection of their interests.[24]

One may stop here to ask: was language the only cause of estrangment between the hills and the plains of Assam? The Aristotelian distinction between the cause and the occasion of a revolution may possibly be applied here. The language issue indeed provided the ground for the hill state movement, but not its substance. The substance of the movement was the hill people's desire for equal status with the Assamese plains people. The hill people did not fight for *their* language but chose the continuation of English. English in Assam, as elsewhere, continues to be the language of transactions among the upper classes. The Assam Language Act formally recognised the special position of English in the hills and of Bengali in the district of Cachar. (It was, however, the violence of 1960 which brought on Assam the censure of the rest of the country and helped the consolidation of the hill state movement.) On September 21, the secretary of the APHLC action committee, S. J. J. Nichols-

Roy, son of the late Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, said at a press conference in Shillong that 'there are more positive reasons than language behind the Hills State demand,'[25] though he did not elaborate on the reasons.

The APHLC was the first and only all-hills organisation – a platform rather than a party. It was certainly not another version of the EITU though it was because of the EITU's opposition that the Khasi–Jaintia National Conference secretary, B. B. Lyngdoh, failed to be elevated to the secretaryship of the APHLC. The compromise candidate who was accepted for the post was, paradoxically, S. J. J. Nichols-Roy. By the end of the decade, the EITU faction was virtually isolated in the APHLC.

In September 1960, the APHLC Council of Action issued an ultimatum to the Assam Chief Minister. In October, when Sangma resigned his cabinet post, the action was welcomed enthusiastically and his personal image improved. On 24 October 1960, APHLC staged a *hartal* (public strike) and a massive demonstration in Shillong. The same night the Assembly had a special sitting and adopted the Bill. From 16 to 18 November 1960, the third All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference met at Haflong in north Cachar, under the chairmanship of a Congress member of parliament, J. B. Hagjer, and resolved that the passage of the Language Bill was 'a clear proof of unfair attitude and firm determination of the Assamese community to avail themselves of undue advantages and thereby enhance their domination over the hills people and the rest of the people of the State of Assam.' Hence it demanded, as the *only solution*, 'the immediate creation of a separate Hill State.'

Notes and References

1 P. D. Stracey, *Nagaland Nightmare*, Bombay, 1968, pp. 70–71.
2 27 June 1952.
3 The company granted the leases but could not function due to local opposition, and had to wind up.
4 *Census of Assam*, 1891, chapter VI, paragraphs 159–64.
5 *The Assam Tribune*, 23 July 1947.
6 *The Assam Tribune*, 4 January 1948.
7 *The Assam Tribune*, 19 April 1948.

8 *A Memorandum on the Creation of a New State in the North-East Border Region of India, Part II*, submitted by the Cachar States Reorganisation Commission, Silchar, April 1954, p. 41.
9 *Memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission submitted by the Hills People of the Autonomous Districts (of Assam)*, Shillong, 1954; proceedings of the chief executive members' meeting in Appendix 'A'.
10 *Proceedings of the Assam Hills Tribal Leaders' Conference, Tura, 6–8 October 1954*, obtained from B. B. Lyngdoh, a minister of Meghalaya.
11 *The Report of the States Reorganisation Commission*, Delhi, 1955, p. 188.
12 *Proceedings of the Assam Hills Tribal Leaders' Conference.*
13 *Personal Memorandum to the SRC*, pp. 14–15.
14 *Notes on the Discussion with the Naga Leaders*, 2 June 1955, obtained from B. B. Lyngdoh.
15 B. B. Lyngdoh's *Notes for Discussion with the P.M.*, 28 August 1955.
16 *Resolution No. 1 (a)*, passed at the Aijal Conference 'unanimously', obtained from B. B. Lyngdoh.
17 *Resolutions of the Fifth Conference of the EITU*, obtained from Ranjit Naug, Shillong.
18 *Memorandum to the Commission for the Hills Areas of Assam, submitted by the All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference, Shillong*, Assam, 8 May 1955.
19 At least one senior leader of the EITU conveyed this impression to the author.
20 During the conference, two Garo National Council members, Emerson Momin, MLA, and R. G. Momin acted as general secretary of the EITU and secretary of the reception committee respectively.
21 *Notice* of the meetings issued by Rev. B. M. Pugh.
22 Resolutions of the All-Assam Hill Leaders' Conference, obtained from Ranjit Naug.
23 *Memorandum to the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, submitted by the All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference*, Appendix 'A'.
24 Ibid., Appendix 'B'.
25 *The Assam Tribune*, 22 September 1960.

CHAPTER 8

Meghalaya

After the conference, two APHLC deputations were sent to Nehru.[1] In November 1960 he offered the Scottish pattern of government for the hills.[2] The APHLC at its fourth session in Shillong (5–7 April 1961) rejected the proposal since it did 'not solve the basic problems'[3] and resolved to boycott the 1962 elections. And there the APHLC committed its first major mistake. The hill state movement had been carried too far. The proponents of the hill state could not measure the reaction that had already set in.

The District Congress Committees in the hills abstained from attending the fifth conference, and on 31 July 1961 held at Shillong an 'Assam Hills Peoples' Conference'[4] which decided to accept Nehru's offer and fight the 1962 general election on the issue. B.M. Pugh joined them. A delegation was sent to Delhi to convey to Nehru their acceptance, at the same time requesting him to defer the appointment of a commission to work out the details of his scheme until a general agreement could be arrived at.[5] In November 1961, the Congress formed its first unit in the Mizo hills when A. Thanglura, the Mizo Union MLA, chief parliamentary secretary to the Assam cabinet and a Hmar, left the Mizo Union. The sixth All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference at Aijal therefore retraced its steps and in view of 'the various factors and changed circumstances' decided 'to modify certain methods of approach and techniques' and left the decision with its 'Council of Action'[6] which met on 6 and 9 October 1961, and decided to contest the general election 'wherever necessary'.[7]

The End of One Hill State

In the 1962 elections the Congress won all four seats of the Mikir and north Cachar hills. The Garo, Khasi and Mizo Districts (11 seats) went to the APHLC. In the Mizo District, of the three APHLC nominees two belonged to the Mizo Union,

one to the UMFO. The APHLC reiterated its old demand, was denied it again and decided to withdraw from the Assembly in preparation for 'direct action'. Now, the Congress manoeuvre gave them a setback. One Mizo Unionist, two Garos and the lone Jaintia MLA declined to resign. The remaining seven followed the APHLC directive. The resignations coincided with the Chinese aggression. The APHLC's prestige was damaged by the defections. Hence the party decided to participate in the by-elections of 1963 'in view of the emergency'[8] and lost the two seats in the Mizo District which went to the extremist Mizo National Front.

It may be worth examining what the APHLC had lost by its belated acceptance of the Nehru offer. On 19 February 1961, Nehru for the first time spelt out his 'general approach', acceptance of which would lead to 'further talks'. Development work and allied subjects would be entrusted to the representatives of the hills and funds intended for the development of the hill areas would be separately earmarked. The powers of the autonomous districts could be enlarged. The elected MLAs from the autonomous districts could form a committee which would especially deal with legislation and like matters relating to the hill districts, which might come up before the Assembly, and their *decision would prevail*, on the pattern of the Committee for Scotland in the British House of Commons. There would be a separate cabinet minister in the Assam government, assisted by one or more deputy ministers, who would deal with these matters, especially development plans for the autonomous districts. Finally, a commission would be appointed to make an investigation and report on proposals for administrative and other changes in the autonomous districts and regions. The commission would also go into the question of how far the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution could be varied and liberalised to confer a greater measure of autonomy on the 'District and Regional Councils'.[9]

Clearly, there were two parts to the proposals. There was the assurance of a *political* settlement on the reorganisation of the state cabinet and legislature. The constitution of the district or regional council was subject to a commission's investigation. The proposal was made when the prestige and strength of the APHLC was at its height and that of the Assam government at

its lowest. On 10 June 1963, after its setbacks, however, when the APHLC delegation met the Prime Minister at Gauhati airport to reopen the talks, they were told to see the Governor. The leaders met the Governor and sought clarification on ten points. Their request was conveyed to Nehru[10] who replied that the hill minister would have to act according to the norms of the cabinet government and 'any legislation dealing with the hill areas' would, *as a matter of convention have to be approved by their representatives* who could certainly initiate legislations also. Such new legislations would be considered by the whole cabinet. But, insofar as they dealt with the hill areas only, the views of the hill areas' representatives would *have special importance.*'[11] Thus began the watering down of the original Nehru plan. On 2 April 1964, the APHLC member of the Lok Sabha, G.G. Swell, had another talk with Nehru on the basis of which the APHLC assumed that Nehru had agreed:

(i) that the Prime Minister's Plan of full autonomy and his other assurances be fully implemented both in letter and spirit;
(ii) that the maximum number of subjects be transferred to the hill administration; and
(iii) that increased representation be given to the Autonomous Districts both in the State Legislature and Parliament.[12]

So they accepted the proposal for the appointment of a commission. Nehru did not confirm the assumptions. Earlier, on 12 February 1964 Nehru had told Swell that *the whole scheme of autonomy* 'was subject to a Commission being appointed to consider the whole thing.'[13] The APHLC apparently was eating humble pie while trying to save its face. It extended full cooperation to the Pataskar Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, which proposed 'no basic change' in the Sixth Schedule.[14] The APHLC was greatly disappointed with the recommendations of the commission and rejected them, raising the demand for a separate hill state again. It is necessary to point out that the Pataskar Commission did not deserve much of the blame heaped upon it by the APHLC and by uninformed outside opinion. The APHLC had missed the bus. Most of the all-India parties welcomed the commission's recommendations while a mutilated APHLC prepared itself for a fresh round of battle, the

opportunity for which came on the eve of the 1967 elections. The APHLC resolved upon a boycott of the elections.

Meanwhile, all-India politics had become murky due to the two battles for succession after the death of Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri. Indira Gandhi could not afford a boycott of the elections in a sensitive area of India so soon after her assumption of the Prime Minister's office. On 27 December 1966, she rushed to Shillong and, after some discussions with Chaliha and the APHLC leaders from 11 to 13 January 1967, promised the reorganisation of Assam. The presidential address to Parliament on 18 March 1967 confirmed the pledge, which in turn was opposed by most of the plains parties of Assam.[15] The federal scheme having been watered down, Asoka Mehta, then a cabinet member, was appointed to head a commission composed of representatives from various political parties of Assam. The APHLC boycotted the commission which opposed the federal idea, and recommended greater autonomy for the hill areas separately. Naturally the APHLC rejected the Mehta Commission plan, resigned from all the Assembly seats it held in the Khasi and the Garo hills, on 25 May 1968, and started a non-violent *satyagraha* on 10 September 1968. On September 11, the Government of India produced the autonomous state plan for the Garo Hills and the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills Districts. The Mikir and the North Cachar Hills Districts were given the option of joining the autonomous state, if they so decided in their district councils, by a two-thirds majority. Overwhelmingly, the two district councils chose to stay with Assam. In view of the disturbed situation in the Mizo District the plan did not cover it.[16]

This gives an estimate of the APHLC's loss. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister in early 1961, the APHLC first mentioned 'a state within a state'[17] comprising all the Assam hills. Meghalaya was set up as a 'state within a state', but a much smaller one than what it could have been in 1961. Full statehood was promised later, but not for all the hills together. On the credit side, the APHLC's record is indeed noteworthy. For the first time in India, a major political demand was fulfilled with practically no violence and by means of sheer organisational ability and public relations. There were indeed two extraneous circumstances aiding the APHLC. First, the deep loyalty of the

Khasi and the Garo to their clan and community facilitated the building of the organisation. Secondly, the experience with Nagaland had taught the Government of India the importance of keeping minorities in the border regions satisfied, even though the Assam government was convinced that the creation of the state of Nagaland had encouraged separatist tendencies in Assam.

The role of the Congress in the hills is indeed less commendable. It was established in the hills in 1938 through the defections of some MLAs, and had also thrived on defections. The conflicting attitudes of the Assam Congress leaders towards the conflicting factions in the hills was mainly responsible for its lack of strength in the hills outside the Mikir and North Cachar Districts. From 1938 to 1945, the Congress hobnobbed with the siems and the Seng Khasi in the Khasi hills. Then Nichols-Roy was picked up. He was alienated in 1956 and the Congress again approached the siems when the UK–J Hills District Council went completely beyond its influence. In the 1965 Independence Day number of a Shillong weekly,[18] the president of the District Congress Committee of the Khasi Hills lamented over the destruction of the powers of the popular siems by the district council and suggested, as *the only answer*, 'the decentralisation of power to the Siemship Durbars and their local units, retaining the legislative and coordinating functions with the District Councils.' The APHLC alleged that the Nokma Association in the Garo hills was a Congress-backed organisation, whereas the Mizo Union charged that the Mizo National Front, the rebel organisation of the Mizo hills, had the backing of the disgruntled ex-chiefs of the Mizo hills in collaboration with the Congress.

The 1967 Elections

The weakness of the Congress was reflected in its debacle in the crucial 1967 elections in the hills. The Assam Congress firmly opposed Mrs Gandhi's declaration at Shillong on 27 December 1966; but instead of meeting the challenge locally, it chose to put pressure on the conflict-ridden central government. In the discussions of the central leaders with the APCC and

the APHLC representatives on 11 and 12 January, the APCC adamantly opposed reorganisation and, in fact, the January 13 declaration came as an *award* of the central government which made no reference to the discussion of the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister with the Chief Minister of Assam.[19] The prestige of the APHLC was boosted. Put in a tight corner, the Khasi Hills District Congress Committee demanded a state for each hill district. While the APHLC decided to contest the elections, it announced that the elections would be a test of the hill people's choice regarding a hill state. The Congress could not set up candidates in the Khasi–Jaintia hills, but decided to fight it out in the other hills. In the Mizo hills it set up one candidate in two assembly constituencies, whereas its candidate for the third seat could not find his name in the electoral roll. The Mizo Union boycotted the elections. The MNF had been outlawed. The APHLC had no candidate. The Congress candidate won unopposed. Later, two nominal by-elections were held in the Mizo hills and won by Congress-backed candidates – one of them a former MNF official.

The Mikir hills, now with three seats, did not want to throw in its lot with a separate hill state. In north Cachar, the Congress got the support of the Jemi Naga whose territorial aspiration, if any, was to go back to Nagaland, not to join a hill state. To many minds, the hill state was going to be dominated by the advanced Khasi. The Congress fought well in the Garo hills but had no political appeal. Of the substantial non-Garo population who were erstwhile Congress followers, the Muslims this time generally voted against the Congress on the understanding that the Garos in Goalpara would vote for the Praja Socialist Party's parliamentary candidate (a Muslim). Its organisational slackness, however, was the greatest weakness of the Congress.

The APHLC, starting its election campaign late, showed masterly organisational skill and bagged all the seats of the Garo and the Khasi–Jaintia hills. The only other all-India party that contested the elections was the Communist party which had some influence among the Hajong refugees from Mymensingh. Their main purpose was not to win the elections, but to build the party in the Garo hills. In this perspective, the role of the 'independents' was significant, especially in the Khasi–Jaintia

hills, where two seats went to the APHLC without any contest. In Shillong, the APHLC candidate was challenged by two Bengali independents. In another constituency of the Khasi hills, Nongstoin, an independent backed by the *siem*, contested against the APHLC candidate. For the lone Jaintia seat of Jowai, a United Opposition Front was formed, presumably with Congress backing, which set up as an independent challenger of the APHLC a person who had earlier defected from the APHLC as an MLA.

All the Assembly seats in the Garo and the Khasi–Jaintia hills went to the APHLC which polled 40,630 and 52,204 of the 64,159 and 73,537 valid votes cast in these areas respectively. The Congress won all the three seats of the Mikir hills with 37,049 of the 52,494 valid votes cast, and the north Cachar seat with 9,934 of the 15,241 valid votes cast. The fourth general election in the Assam hills, as a result, decisively established the APHLC leadership in the Garo Hills and the UK–J Hills Districts, and the leadership of the Congress in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills Districts.

The Congress strategy of struggle by proxy failed tragically in the only 'general' Assembly constituency of Shillong,[20] a non- Khasi majority area. Political movements, except those of the APHLC, were generally rare in the hills of Assam. Shillong was no exception, though the Bengali employees in government offices were trade-union minded. In the wake of the language disturbances of 1960–61, the Bengali community there helped the APHLC candidate win the elections of 1962 and 1963. In 1962, a Bengali Communist party candidate got only 3000 votes.

The countrywide food movement of 1966 touched the horizon of Shillong in 1966, though the APHLC refused to take part in it. Shillong for some time seemed fertile for leftist politics. In October, however, the municipal elections were held on somewhat communal lines. On the other hand, the conflict between the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) and the District Congress Committee (DCC) over the DCC's new stand remaining unsolved, a Town Congress was set up in Shillong in November 1966, with direct affiliation to the APCC. A candidate of the Town Congress was tentatively found in an Assamese lady (widow of a Bengali newspaper correspondent).

Shortly after the Prime Minister's visit, about seventy people – mostly Bengali, a few Assamese, Gorkhas, Marwaris and Sindhis – met on 3 January 1967, and formed an association which called itself the Shillong United Citizens' Association (SUCA), in order to demand of the Union government adequate protection of non-tribal interests in Shillong. The crowd consisted predominantly of non-party people, but there were some Congressites, a few Jan Sanghis, the leader of the local Gorkha organisation and a Communist. A memorandum was hastily drafted, declaring: 'We, therefore, come to the conclusion that since the Hill State movement is already on its last legs and gasping for breath, the desperate leaders should not be given too much importance.'[21]

The demand eminently suited the APCC though it was not favourably considered by the central government. The SUCA therefore decided to fight it out in the elections and set up the Congresswoman as their candidate. Her name was not, however, found in the voters' list and an alternative was found in an independent Bengali lawyer, father of a top police official and long associated with Congress. The new choice proved to be equally unfortunate for the generally anti-Congress Bengali community. With the growth of tension between the SUCA and the APHLC, the most widely circulated English daily of Assam, *The Assam Tribune*, called the contest a Bengali affair. Inevitably, the elections took on a communal colour. The Communists silently dropped out. The whole battle was left to a few amateurs. The position became still more controversial when the Congress elements in the SUCA started campaigning openly for the Congress candidate for the very sensitive parliamentary seat. Opinion was divided in every non-Khasi community and voting among the Bengali, Gorkha and Assamese Communities was very thin, but was generally for the SUCA. An important SUCA leader explained it as a 'fear complex'. Some of the siems and the Congressite Khasis were privately sympathetic towards the SUCA but were made ineffective by the APHLC, which polled about sixty per cent of the valid votes cast. Shillong went to the APHLC and had a small-scale Khasi–Bengali riot.

Crisis in the APHLC

As things were heading for a climax, the Khasi siems in June 1968 made a representation to the President of India praying that the terms and conditions of their agreements with the Dominion of India, which 'were never modified nor any new arrangement made so far between the parties thereto, be not lost sight of and should and ought to be respected and given full effect to, in the reorganisation of the administrative set-up of these hill areas, and that the rights of all Khasi Siemships and of the people living therein as envisaged by the solemn agreement executed, should be fully protected and preserved.'[22]

The immediate provocation for the deputation appeared to have been a charge sheet issued by the chief executive member of the UK–J Hills District Council against the *siem* of Mylliem on 17 April 1968,[23] after which a demonstration by the supporters of the siem took place. The chief executive member had to withdraw the charge sheet, but he later filed a suit of trespass and extortion against some of the demonstrators. A demonstration by the district council's supporters followed. Referring to this conflict the Shillong representative of *The Statesman* reported that 'Revivalism has made its appearance among the educated Khasis, a group which had hitherto been oriented towards modernization,' and that 'the Congress is supporting the revivalist demand of the Chiefs as part of its opposition to the APHLC.'[24]

The next major crisis followed shortly, when Hopingston Lyngdoh was first suspended in July 1968, and later expelled on a charge of misusing the volunteer force of the party raised for the forthcoming *satyagraha*. Lyngdoh, an ex-EITU man and secretary of its Khasi Hills District volunteer organisation, soon formed the Hill State People's Democratic Party. It was chiefly to neutralise this 'extremist' section that the APHLC decided to launch a non-violent civil disobedience movement on September 10, while continuing negotiations with the central government. The immediate reaction of the APHLC leaders to the award of an autonomous state was not favourable and the secretary of the APHLC, Stanley Nichols-Roy, called it 'totally unacceptable'. Yet Sangma from Delhi advised suspension of the movement.[25] Subsequently, the APHLC decided to give the

scheme a fair trial while reiterating its demand for a full state as the ultimate goal.

The Birth of Meghalaya

Following the 22nd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, on 24 December 1969 Parliament created history by passing the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Bill[26] simultaneously in the two Houses in order to create 'an Autonomous State to be known as "Meghalaya" within the State of Assam' comprising the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District as defined in the Sixth Schedule.[27] The most important feature of the Meghalaya Act (Act 55 of 1969) was that it created a new tier in India's state structure, similar to the autonomous republics of the former USSR. The executive power of the new unit was vested in the Governor of Assam, aided and advised by the Council of Ministers of Meghalaya, in relation to the autonomous state.[28] A Legislative Assembly was also created with membership open to all Indians. (With the exception of Shillong, all seats in the autonomous districts for election to the Assam legislature had been restricted to the scheduled tribes of the autonomous districts.) Further, the Governor was empowered to nominate up to three members from the minority communities if, in his opinion, they were inadequately represented.

There was a major change in the judicial organisation inasmuch as all judicial authorities of the district council were virtually transferred to the autonomous state through an amendment of paragraph 4 of the Sixth Schedule. The Government of Meghalaya was empowered to constitute village courts and courts of appeal with jurisdiction over non-tribals as well as tribals. This could divest the district council of its judicial authority but Meghalaya did not establish its own courts and the old structure continues. The authority of the High Court of Assam was not altered.

Article 244A (added by the 22nd Amendment) of the Constitution enabled the President to transfer powers from the concurrent and state lists of the Seventh Schedule to Meghalaya. Consequently, the Meghalaya Act transferred several state

subjects excluding public order, armed police, railway police, industry and sales tax from Assam to Meghalaya. The Assam and Meghalaya legislatures got concurrent jurisdiction on agriculture, forests, transport and communication and waterways. Industries other than those declared by Parliament as of national importance or necessary for defence were to be concurrently owned by Assam and Meghalaya. Such concurrent authorities were evidently for the purpose of economic coordination.

The distribution of power between Assam and Meghalaya did not work smoothly. Thus, Meghalaya did not get a separate public service commission of its own. The Meghalaya government appointed a selection board for certain types of appointments. Many senior appointments in the Meghalaya secretariat came in for sharp criticism from the Assam civil servants due to procedural irregularities. In early June 1971, through an ordinance, a Meghalaya Subsidiary Force was created with vaguely defined police powers although the Meghalaya government has power only over the town and village police (as defined by the Police Act of 1861).

Shillong

Confusion shrouded the position of Shillong, the common capital. Before Independence, Shillong was made of certain 'British' areas ceded by the siem of Mylliem and certain areas belonging to the siem, technically being part of a native state. But as the township expanded, with the siem issuing *patta* for fallow lands to individuals and governmental agencies, certain laws of the British territories including the jurisdiction of the municipality were extended to the 'state' area.

In 1884 British Shillong, part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, came under the operation of the Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880. In 1898 by Notification No. 3151-J dated August 4, the Code of Criminal Procedure was applied in British Shillong. In 1916 by the application of foreign jurisdiction, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Penal Code were extended also to the Mylliem area of Shillong. Otherwise Shillong, like the other parts of the district, continued to be

administered according to the rules for administration of justice and police in the K and J (Khasi and Jaintia) Hills District. In 1947, the Shillong Civil Courts and Laws Act[29] repealed a portion of the rules for justice for the purpose of Shillong and established a civil court in the former British portion of the town. The power of a district civil judge was being exercised by the district judge of Kamrup (at Gauhati). The sessions court for Shillong also was at Gauhati. Politically, there were two Shillongs – the British and the Mylliem. Whereas Mylliem Shillong was nominally part of a native state, British Shillong was never included in the 'backward tracts' since 1919, and had representation in the provincial legislatures like the plains areas. The Bardoloi subcommittee did not lay down any special provision for Shillong except that, in view of its mixed population, the Assembly constituency including Shillong would not be reserved for the scheduled tribes of the autonomous districts, and would not be included within those districts. With the merger of the Khasi states with Assam and their inclusion in the autonomous United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District, the portion of Shillong town formerly belonging to the Mylliem siemship was only partially included within the scope of the Sixth Schedule. As a result, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District of the British days continued to exist, covering only the former British portion of Shillong, the 31 British villages being merged with the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District. The K and J Hills District and the UK–J Hills District have been, consequently, 'two entirely separate districts.' An order of the Government of Assam, Tribal Affairs Department, told the deputy commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District that, so far as the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District was concerned, he had the authority (in addition to that of deputy commissioner, K and J Hills District) 'to exercise judicial powers and discharge administrative functions over the area within the autonomous United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District.' To specify the two separate roles of the deputy commissioner, the order further laid down that, in order to 'enable the deputy commissioner of the respective districts to exercise statutory powers and jurisdiction in such cases', the deputy commissioner, K and J Hills District, was appointed *ex–officio* deputy commissioner, United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District. The additional deputy

commissioner and the assistant to the deputy commissioner, K and J Hills District, were similarly assigned *ex–officio* to the UK–J Hills (Autonomous) District.[30]

An administrative anomaly cropped up when, on 2 April 1970, the services of the two deputy commissioners of the Garo and the Khasi–Jaintia Hills Districts were 'placed at the disposal' of the Government of Meghalaya to serve in their appropriate capacities. The two deputy commissioners were mentioned by name and designated as deputy commissioners of the Garo Hills District and the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District, though they were made responsible to the Government of Assam in respect of the functions relating to state subjects. But technically such functions would relate only to the territories included in Meghalaya.[31] The notification mentioned nothing about the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District (the Assam portion of Shillong). Technically, therefore, the deputy commissioner was in a doubtful position in Shillong. It was only after the attainment of full statehood by Meghalaya that the anomaly was removed.

District Councils

Through the amendment of the Sixth Schedule the maximum strength of the district councils was raised from 24 to 30. Some local governmental powers of the councils were increased while their functional autonomy was reduced. The district or regional councils were required to take the Governor's approval for rules relating to the composition of the district or regional councils, allocation of seats therein, delimitation of territorial constituencies for and fixing of the qualifications of the voters and of the candidates in the elections to the district council, the fixing of the term of the members of the regional council (that for the members of a district council now being fixed at five years), determining the procedure and conduct of business and the appointment of officers and staff of the district or regional councils, the formation of subordinate local councils or boards along with regulation of their business and, generally, all matters relating to the transaction of business pertaining to the administration of the district or region. The Governor, instead

of the district or regional council, would frame rules for the district or regional fund. The fund was required to be maintained in such form as the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India, with the approval of the President, would prescribe, and would have to be audited by his office. It may be recalled that the Pataskar Commission had specifically complained against bad maintenance of accounts by the district councils.[32] Taxes and tolls imposed by the district or regional council would need the Governor's assent to be effective. Earlier, the Governor could annul or suspend an act or resolution of a district council if that would 'endanger the security of the state'. Now, he could do so also if such an act or resolution was 'prejudicial to public order'. The Governor could declare a kind of constitutional breakdown of a district council for six months.

Reduction of the functional autonomy of the district council went on longer in Meghalaya than in Assam presumably because Meghalaya was regarded as a 'tribal state'.[33] By executive delegation, on the other hand, the Government of Assam enhanced the power of the Mikir and North Cachar District Councils. The 22nd Amendment had made provision for a committee in the Assam legislature with MLAs from those districts. Legislations of the Meghalaya government were given overwhelming jurisdiction on the laws of the district councils within Meghalaya in respect of unreserved forests, canals or water courses for the purpose of agriculture, and village and town administration including village and town police, public health and sanitation. In other respects, the autonomy of the district councils was preserved. Yet, Meghalaya acquired concurrent power (with the Centre) on: marriage and divorce; will, intestacy and succession; social customs; and appointment and succession of chiefs and headmen corresponding to entry 5 of the concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule to the Indian Constitution. It was not clear whether 'social custom' and 'appointment and succession of chiefs and headmen' really corresponded to entry 5 which mentions: marriage and divorce; infants and minors; adoption; will, intestacy and succession; joint family and partition; and 'all matters in respect of which parties in judicial proceedings were immediately before the commencement of the Constitution subject to their personal law'. The assumption obviously was that chiefship was a

matter of 'personal law', although the chiefs in the Khasi hills had enjoyed political status. It is possible that the confusion arose out of the Khasi chiefs' representation in July 1968 to the effect that:

> the Siemships functioning in the Khasi Hills have their foundation and basis on the people and the continuation of the aforesaid institution and organisation are absolutely necessary in order to preserve the Khasi way of life based on their ancient traditions, customs and usages.[34]

State Politics

After the formation of Meghalaya, the APHLC became confined to that state. Gratitude to the central government resulted in a section of the APHLC leadership leaning towards the Congress. The Garo National Council, which had not formally dissolved itself, showed distinct empathy for the official Congress. The lack of a personal equation among the Khasi leaders stood in the way of Congress–APHLC unity.[35]

The Hills State People's Democratic Party, the oldest local opposition group could not make any dent in the Garo hills. It did not contest the 1970 Assembly elections in which only the district council members were the electors. But it fielded G.G. Swell in the Lok Sabha elections of 1971 and secured almost half as many votes as the APHLC in the Khasi hills. The Lok Sabha constituency included the Khasi–Jaintia hills, the Mikir hills and the north Cachar hills, but not the Garo hills. The Congress had no candidate in the constituency but an independent Mikir got the support of some Congress members which enabled him to secure an overwhelming number of votes in the Mikir hills. The Garo hills were tagged with a part of the contiguous Goalpara district. The APHLC gave its unstinted support to the Congress candidate, Moinul Huq Choudhury. The episode showed the divergences not only of Congress politics in the hills but of the responses of the political factions in the hills to them.[36]

Notes and References

1 On 24 and 26 November 1960, and on 11 May 1961.
2 The highlight of the scheme was the constitution of a committee in the Legislative Assembly of Assam, comprising all MLAs from the hills, to examine the legislative proposals for the hill areas.
3 Memorandum to the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference, Appendix 'D'.
4 However, Congress members from the Jaintia hills did not join the deputation to Delhi.
5 *Memorandum of the Government of Assam to the Commission appointed by the Government of India to consider a detailed scheme for the reorganisation of the administrative set-up of the autonomous districts of Assam*, 1965, Shillong, 1965, p. 3.
6 APHLC's *Memorandum*, Appendix 'F'.
7 Ibid., Appendix 'G'.
8 Ibid., Appendix, Resolution No. 2 (Pataskar).
9 Quoted in the *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam*, (Delhi, 1966, p. 155) from Nehru's letter to the secretary, APHLC, dated 19 February 1961.
10 Ibid., pp. 158–59, emphasis added.
11 Ibid., p. 169, emphasis added.
12 APHLC's *Memorandum*, Appendix 'N'.
13 Quoted by the Commission on Hill Areas, *Report*, p. 161.
14 Ibid., p. 127.
15 The central cabinet also appeared to be split, more or less on the lines of the later division of Congress. The Government of Assam got the sympathy of the opponents of Mrs Gandhi.
16 The Mizo National Front's success in the 1963 by-elections forced the Mizo Union to demand a Mizoram state within India, while the MNF raised the slogan of a sovereign Mizoram.
17 Quoted in the Pataskar *Report*, p. 163.
18 *The Indian* (Shillong) edited by B.K. Dey, Independence Day number 1965.
19 The communique read:

> The Prime Minister and the Home Minister have held detailed discussions with the leaders of the APHLC. The Government of India appreciate the political aspirations of the people of the hill areas and have decided to reorganise the State...

20 See also S.K. Chaube, 'Politics and Election in the Assam Hills', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 1967, Conference Number.

21 Memorandum of the Shillong United Citizens' Association to Prime Minister of India, dated January 5 1967, p. 4.
22 *To the Hon'ble President of India (New Delhi), Through the Governor of Assam, Shillong, the 15th June 1968 – The Humble Memorial of the Khasi Tribal Chiefs and the Representa- tives of the Khasi People inhabiting the Khasi Hills, on the North-East of India, at present attached to the State of Assam*, Shillong, 1968.
23 *The Assam Tribune*, Gauhati, 2 May 1968.
24 *The Statesman*, 11 May 1968.
25 *The Frontier Times*, Shillong, 12 September 1968.
26 Act No. 55 of 1969. It obtained the President's assent on 29 December 1969, vide *The Gazette of India, Extraordinary*, part II, section II.
27 Paragraph 20.
28 Sections 2/f, 4 and 6 of the Act.
29 *The Assam Gazette*, 9 April 1947, part II. The Act came into force on 16 April 1947.
30 Government of Assam, Notification No. TAD/R/40/50/7, dated Shillong, 31 March 1951.
31 Government of Assam, Notification No. 241/69/PF/3, *The Assam Gazette*, 6 May 1970, part I.
32 *Report* of the Pataskar Commission, p. 87.
33 The Meghalaya District Council relations were subjected to strain within a short time. In September 1971, an opposition member in the APHLC-controlled Jowai District Council started a discussion on a subject belonging to the autonomous state. One member belonging to the faction opposed to the official faction in the APHLC supported him and was, as a result, suspended from the party – vide *The Implanter*, 2 October 1971.
34 *Memorandum* of the siems to the President of India.
35 The factional conflicts within the APHLC came to the open in November 1972. See *The Statesman*, 24 November 1972, report: 'Clash of Personalities Lands APHLC in Crisis.'
36 When a Khasi MLA left the Congress to join the APHLC in 1972, he wrote in his resignation letter that he was leaving 'in the interest of my people and to strengthen the hands of Shrimati Indira Gandhi.'

CHAPTER 9

Naga Politics

Describing the Naga's transition between 1929 and 1949, a Khasi former deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills District wrote that 'the proverbial Naga hospitality was still there, but the naive and simple Naga that I had been so much used to in earlier years was hard to find.' The Marwari shopkeepers of Kohima had left during the Japanese advance in 1942. 'Naga shopkeepers had installed themselves in their places though not yet quite effectively. In the 20 years or so that had elapsed, education had made rapid advances in the district and the war had also brought the Naga into close contact with different nationalities and people with different ways of thinking and aggressive ethical values. He was now worldly-wise and sophisticated and, what was more, he was very politically minded.'[1]

The war's greatest contribution was the creation of a tiny middle class among the Naga. It is a contention of this volume that a rising middle class is the vanguard of the moderate solidarity movement in the hills. But the solidarity movement being in origin an elite ideology, it suffers from one weakness – remoteness of the common people from its cause. In the Khasi hills for instance, where detribalisation has gone a long way into the social set-up, the traditional leadership of the chiefs and headmen is still a formidable force having direct touch with the people. The emergence of the Naga National Council out of the Naga District Tribal Council heralded the rise of the middle class intellectuals. The NNC's resolution in June 1946 was integrationist and opposed to the 'grouping plan' of the Cabinet Mission. It may be noted here that the controversial 'grouping plan' of the Cabinet Mission provided the Assam Congress a common platform with most of the hill parties.

The Naga National Council was intended to be a 'government' – even though a 'tribal' or, more accurately, an inter-tribal one. The Naga were *not* a single tribe, and they claimed to be a 'nation'. The NNC secretary, Imti Aliba Ao, explained to the

Bardoloi subcommittee that the organisation was territorial. It was a district organisation and split into two central councils, organised subdivisionally, at Kohima and Mokokchung. Each central council was split into a number of tribal councils. In a tribal area, the minority groups formed sub-tribal councils. Usually, a sub-tribal council was formed with five villages. Members were, however, not elected but 'chosen'.[2]

The two central councils were, however, examples in contrast. The Kohima Central Council consisted of 12 members of whom seven were Angami. The Mokokchung Central Council had 15 members, five of them Ao, four Sema, three Lhota, two Sangtam and one Chang. The Konyaks had not attended the first meeting of the council and were not represented. There was no representation from the unadministered area. The founder vice- president of the NNC was Mayangnokcha Ao and the secretary, Imti Aliba Ao. The joint secretary of the NNC was an Angami, T. Sakhrie. Imti Aliba, son of a pastor and a graduate, had been secretary of the Hills Students' Federation, an affiliate of the All-India Students' Federation. The Kohima Central Council was presided over by a Liangmei school teacher of Kohima, Lungalong. When the Bardoloi subcommittee was constituted with Mayangnokcha Ao as a member, he did not accept the position and Aliba was taken instead. When the subcommittee reached Kohima, there was no permanent president of the NNC.

The deputy commissioner, Pawsey, had submitted to the subcommittee a list of the organisations to be interviewed. But he left Kohima shortly before the arrival of the subcommittee, on an investigation into a headhunting report received from the unadministered area a month earlier. Kevichusa Angami, senior extra assistant commissioner at Kohima, acted as the guardian angel of the NNC. The Bardoloi subcommittee did not want government officers to speak on behalf of a political organisation, but Lungalong explained that most of the Naga leaders were government servants. The secretary of the subcommittee observed that:

> On the whole, the attitude of the NNC and the general atmosphere seemed to have taken an unpleasant turn since the (Assam) Premier's visit (in November 1946). It was clearly perceived that

the Council was now dominated by certain Angami leaders like Kevichusa and Lungalong and the more reasonable elements were prevented from asserting themselves (a) on account of the Naga system of not deciding matters by a majority but by a general agreement only, and (b) by the threat of force which seemed to hold the NNC together.[3]

There was enough power at the disposal of the government officials, particularly the senior extra assistant commissioner, Kevichusa. Lungalong told the Bardoloi subcommittee that 'The Kohima Central Council with tens of States under it came to a decision that the Kohima Central Council will give evidence in the name of the Naga National Council and that all other tribes, the different Sub-States will not give evidence separately.' The non-Naga groups of Dimapur were of course presented before the subcommittee, at its insistence, and spoke against the NNC decision. The subcommittee did not visit the other subdivision, Mokokchung, and the Aos were trying to save the unity of the NNC. Mayangnokcha explained that the new position of the NNC was the product of general agreement.[4] It is striking that the June 1946 resolution of the NNC had been passed at Wokha in Mokokchung and the February 1947 resolution at Kohima. The Kohima Central Council was even reluctant to nominate a person for cooption to the Bardoloi subcommittee. The Bardoloi *Report* was vetoed by the Angami member, Kezehol, but accepted by the Sema member, Khetloushe, who replaced him when Kezehol resigned during the last meeting of the subcommittee.

A total reconstruction of the politics of the Naga hills in the period is as yet difficult to make because of the reticence of the people who had close connections with the NNC in its formative period. Circumstantial evidence only permits guesswork. It appears that many Naga officials were working for the creation of an 'autonomous Nagaland' where they would naturally be the 'nabobs', possibly under His Majesty's umbrella. Secondly, most of the meetings of the NNC were held in the bungalows of the officials, including that of the deputy commissioner, as the building of the Naga Club to which Phizo later shifted the NNC office had not yet been reconstructed after the war. Thirdly, though the British deputy commissioner did not appear for

the interview before the subcommittee, his connivance at his own subordinates advocating 'independence' could hardly be kept away from public view. Fourthly, it was primarily the 'grouping plan' of the Cabinet Mission which brought the NNC on a common platform with the Assam Congress. Fifthly, the cordiality which the Nagas showed to Bardoloi in November 1946 might well have been personal. The Naga cherished a high opinion about two Assamese politicians, Gopinath Bardoloi and Bimala Prasad Chaliha. Lastly, it was not until the early days of 1947 that the definite possibility of British withdrawal dawned upon the Naga, and the visit of Governor Clow in January that year, ostensibly to advise the Naga to find their place in India, must have contributed to the reveille. In fact, Clow's visit was then perceived with some suspicion in nationalist circles. It is significant that neither in February nor in May did the NNC correspond with the Constituent Assembly. Both the February 19 resolution and the letter from the NNC joint-secretary, J. T. Sakhrie, demanding a 'guardian power' were sent to His Majesty's Government and the Government of India, at the care of Lord Mountbatten, who referred them to the advisory committee of the Constituent Assembly. In view of all this, it appears that the Bardoloi subcommittee did a bit of oversimplification when it concluded that 'many of them were inclined to take moderate views on the lines of the original resolution passed at Wokha but in view of the intrasigence of certain other members, probably of the Angami group, they were prevented from doing so.'

Imti Aliba Ao, the NNC secretary, continued to strive for a settlement. The result was the nine-point 'Hydari agreement'. Its preamble recognised 'the right of the Naga to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes.' The agreement provided that all cases involving the Naga within the Naga hills would be tried by the duly constituted Naga courts according to Naga customary law. On the executive side the Naga Council would control those subjects that they could pay for. Land and natural resources of the Naga hills could not be alienated without the consent of the council, which would also have the power over land revenue, house tax and other taxes. The Nagas outside the district would be brought under one united administration and forests formerly belonging to them

should be restored to the district. But the insoluble difference arose on the ninth point of the agreement:

> The Governor of Assam as the Agent of Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this agreement: at the end of this period, the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga be arrived at.

Nothing in the agreement suggested that the Nagas' participation in India was temporary though the NNC insisted upon that interpretation. The government interpreted the agreement in the light that Nagas had the freedom only to suggest revision of the administrative pattern after ten years, an interpretation which was unacceptable to the NNC.

The Ascendancy of Phizo

Angami Zapu Phizo was yet to gain any importance in the NNC. Suffering from personal frustration (arising out of his failure in early life in the matriculation examination and in business) he had returned from Burma after collaborating with the Japanese army (and not, as is sometimes believed, with the INA). In July 1947 Phizo led a deputation to Delhi with the ultimatum that the Naga would declare independence after 14 August 1947. Two of the other members of the seven-member delegation were Kezehol, who had earlier resigned from the Bardoloi subcommittee, and T. Sakhrie, joint secretary of the NNC and the alter ego of Imti Aliba Ao. The group reportedly met Gandhi at the Bhangi colony in Delhi on 19 July 1947. Gandhi, after trying unsuccessfully to argue with them, reportedly, said in his characteristic way:

> The Nagas have every right to become independent. We did not want to live under the domination of the British and they are now leaving us. I want you to feel that India is yours. I feel that Naga Hills is mine just as it is yours. But if you say that it is not mine, the matter must stop there. I believe in the brotherhood of

> man, but I do not believe in force and forced unions. If you do not wish to join the Union of India nobody will force you to that.[5]

On 15 August 1947, Phizo declared the independence of Nagaland. But there is nothing to suggest that the NNC as a party had anything to do with it. Its secretary was still Imti Aliba Ao, whose position was indeed becoming difficult because of the refusal of the government to accept the NNC's interpretation. He met Nehru in Delhi to press the NNC's official view. The interview has been described by the Naga leaders as 'stormy'. Nehru advised Aliba to work within the Sixth Schedule. On his return to Kohima, Aliba issued an ultimatum to the Government of India to the effect that unless within a month, the nine-point agreement was amended to incorporate the NNC's view, the Nagas would set up their own independent government. Phizo, then lurking in political wilderness, mocked at the ultimatum: 'We owe India an apology for this foolish ultimatum.' Soon Aliba retired from politics for an appointment in the budding Indian Frontier Administrative Service and Phizo formed an obscuranist organisation called the Naga Clans Council. He was detained in 1949 and released on compassionate grounds. The NNC decisively rejected the government interpretation of the 'Hydari agreement' only after Phizo became its president in November 1949, defeating Vizar Angami of Zakhama village by a margin of one vote. His ascendancy began in May 1951, when he toured the district campaigning for a plebiscite on the question of Naga independence and boycott of the Government of India as well as the elections called by it (in 1952). Phizo met Nehru in December 1951 (near Tezpur in Assam), in March 1952 (at Delhi), and in July 1952 (at Dibrugarh in Assam), and was then arrested in Burma for illegal entry. On 24 October 1952, when Nehru was visiting Mao, in Manipur the vice-president of the NNC, Imkongmeren Ao, submitted a memorandum to him complaining against an incident on 18 October 1952, involving the life of a Naga at Kohima, and reminding him of the Nagas' desire for freedom. The sensitivity of the unadministered Indo-Burma border region occasioned a joint tour by Nehru and U Nu, the Premiers of the two countries.

On 30 March 1953, when Nehru and U Nu came to Kohima, the Assam government (or their officials) behaved most

clumsily. The NNC proposed to submit another memorandum to Nehru, when the deputy commissioner of the district (the first Assamese Hindu in that post), by an order banned 'address either in speech or in writing.' When the Naga delegation insisted on meeting Nehru, they were sternly disallowed by the deputy commissioner, apparently without the knowledge of Nehru. Dramatically but silently, Nehru's public meeting thinned down. Later on coming to know of it, Nehru was reportedly furious with the local administration. He never visited Nagaland again.

After the NNC's decision to boycott the Government of India, in early 1952 ominous posters and letters appeared, threatening government employees, especially Naga employees. The Government anticipated trouble and suddenly launched a widespread police action. On 4 April 1953 the police raided the house of T. Sakhrie, secretary of the Naga National Council. On April 7 several other villages were raided and guns seized. On May 3 there was a massive joint raid by the Assam police and the Assam Rifles on Khonoma, the village of Phizo, which had had a long record of turbulence since 1839. On 26 May 1953 the Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous Districts) Act of 1953 was enacted with immediate effect. On July 14 it was applied in the Naga Hills District. Altogether nine new police outposts were opened in the district in the same year. On 12 August 1953 the Naga tribal councils and the tribal courts set up by them were dissolved. The Naga students of Kohima Government High School boycotted the Independence Day celebration of 1953, as a result of which the school was temporarily closed. A government press note dated 9 September 1953 stated: 'About 19 students of the school not only carried on active propaganda to boycott the Independence Day celebrations under the instigation of the Naga National Council and submitted a most objectionable written memorandum to their Head Master, but also were reported to have secretly threatened assault to teachers and students who would dare to join the function. The students belonging to the Kuki, Nepali and other communities, numbering about 100, joined the procession and Independence Day celebrations in spite of the threats of molestation and violence.'[6] Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code (prohibiting the gathering of over four persons) was also applied in Kohima.

Soon a goodwill mission of the APCC led by its president, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, and another of the Assam unit of the Praja Socialist Party led by its president, Hareswar Goswami, visited the Naga hills. In return, a Naga goodwill mission led by Rano M. Iralu, niece of Phizo and president of the Naga Women's Federation, visited Assam from 30 November to 15 December 1953. The mission was chiefly utilised to generate publicity for the Naga's 'genuine apprehensions' regarding certain recent moves including the President's Regulation proclaiming compulsory labour in certain circumstances in the Naga hills, the Government of Assam's decision to ban the tribal councils and courts, and the alleged rape of women by the armed forces.

The growth of tension finally results in violence, but Verrier Elwin asserted that 'the NNC never officially approved a policy of violence.'[7] He added, 'The first plan was to infiltrate agents into the more remotely administered villages in Tuensang and by mobilising the more virile tribes there, whose contact with the Administration was shorter and where communications were more difficult, to set up a base for operations backed by the international frontier with Burma.'[8] On 19 January 1954 the North-East Frontier Areas (Administration) Regulation was passed. In September 1954 Phizo formed the People's Sovereign Republic of Free Nagaland with the support of the Chang chiefs of Tuensang area. There was a severe headhunting clash in October 1954 in the village of Pangsha, notorious since 1936 for such clashes, as the 'immediate result of insurgent propaganda in the hitherto politically innocent border-ranges of Tuensang'.[9] In 1955 administration was extended to Tuensang (the former Naga Tribal Area) through the introduction of the Assam Frontier Tracts (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945, and the promulgation of the Tuensang Frontier Division (Assimilation of Laws) Regulation of 1955. The Tuensang Frontier Division (Undesirable Persons) Regulation of 1955 enabled the Political Officer to check the intrusion of undesirable persons from outside the division and to expel such persons from there. In the spring of 1955 the NEFA administration called in two companies of the army and suppressed the violence in Tuensang. Phizo moved to his home ground in the Kohima Subdivision. In 1955 the NNC had a meeting in the village of Khonoma, Phizo's place, where two other Angami leaders of Khonoma – T. Sakhrie, secretary of

the NNC from its inception, and Zasokie – broke off from Phizo. In revenge Phizo got Sakhrie murdered in January 1956.

The foundation of the Naga Central Government[10] on 22 March 1956, therefore, can reasonably be interpreted as Phizo's search for a broader platform after the virtual collapse of the NNC. The central government, according to a statement issued in October 1966 in Delhi by Kughato Sukhai, the then 'prime minister' of the Federal Government, was the result of a merger of the NNC and the Government of Free Nagaland. But the NNC kept its separate existence after that. The constitution of the central government was signed by one Hongkin, 'head' of the 'free government' now reduced to a *kilonser* (minister), and another Phizoite Chang, Thungti, calling himself the chief of the Naga Home Guard.[11] On July 13 Khriesanisa Angami became head of the new 'government'. In October 1959 after Phizo's departure from Naga hills, the powerful Sema rivals of Phizo took over the 'government' and Scato (Sukhato Sughato) Swu became its head.

In 1955 the Assam Disturbed Areas Ordinance was passed and replaced by the Assam Disturbed Areas Act. On 1 January 1956 the Act was enforced in the Naga hills. In April peace-keeping duties in the district were handed over to the army. By this time the rebel strength was calculated to have gone up to about 15,000. In spite of severe restrictions imposed by the army command, there were excesses.[12] But the army's job was well done. Phizo had to flee the district in 1958, amidst resentment among the Nagas against the troubles brought about by his violence.

After the death of Sakhrie, the moderate Naga leaders gradually united. Meanwhile, the American Baptist missionaries, whose activities had come under fire during 1953–54, were packed off from the district, and the management of the Church was taken over by the educated Nagas themselves. In September and October 1956, Naga deputations met Prime Minister Nehru in Shillong and Delhi and Nehru assured them of greater autonomy after the establishment of peace in the area. In early 1957 the Church lent its support to the peace efforts, and from 22 to 26 August 1957 an All-Tribes Naga People's Convention met at Kohima with 1765 delegates and over 2000 visitors from all the tribes. The first resolution

adopted by the convention called for a negotiated settlement of the Naga question, and the third suggested the creation of an administrative unit with the Naga Hills District and the Tuensang Division of NEFA (the former Naga Tribal Area under the External Affairs Ministry of the Government of India which was then under the charge of Nehru). Further negotiations followed.

In 1957 there was another show of holding elections. Only three candidates from the three constituencies sought election. There was no contest and no polling. One of the persons elected to the Assam Assembly (Khelhoshe Sema) became a deputy minister of Assam for some time, that is, until the end of November 1957.

Towards Statehood

On 1 December 1957 the Naga Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA), comprising the Naga Hills District (formerly a part A tribal area) and the Tuensang District (formerly a part B tribal area), was constituted as a part B tribal area within Assam.[13] The Regulation created the post of a commissioner to assist the Governor in the administration of the NHTA. The Governor appointed deputy commissioners for the districts within the NHTA, to function under the supervision of the commissioner. The rules for administration of justice for the Naga Hills District remained valid in Kohima and Mokokchung while the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Order continued to apply in Tuensang. Shortly after, the President of India issued the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Regulation of 1958.

Further political developments, however, led the area fast towards statehood. An interim arrangement was decided upon by the end of 1960. On 24 January 1961, the Ministry of Law (Legislative Department) issued the Nagaland (Transitional Provisions) Regulation of 1962. The Regulation, based on a 16-point memorandum presented by the Naga People's Convention in July 1960, for the first time used the name Nagaland though the Constitution retained the name of Naga Hills Tuensang Area as a part B tribal area within Assam. Provision was made for the appointment of a 'council by the name of the Interim

Body,' by the Governor of Assam, with a maximum strength of 45, distributed as follows:

Ao 4; Angami 4; Chakhesang 4;
Chang 2; Dimapur 2; Konyak 4;
Kheimungan 2; Sangtam 3;
Sema 4; Yumchungar 2
Zeliang-Kuki 3; Nominated 3.

The elections were to be held according to rules made 'with regard to the custom and usages' of the tribes, and the members were to take oath. The Interim Body would work for three years unless sooner dissolved by the Governor, and would meet at least once in four months. It would have 'the right to discuss and make recommendations' to the Executive Council on:

a. matters of administration involving general policy and schemes of development, and
b. any other matter referred to it by the Executive Council.

It was provided that the Interim Body would not discuss any matter exclusively affecting, or relating to, the Tuensang District except with the consent of the members from that district. The Interim Body might also recommend in regard to the constitution and composition of the Legislative Assembly of the state of Nagaland, the manner in which its members would be chosen and all matters connected therewith and incidental thereto. Its functions were only 'advisory' but the Executive Council would pay due regard to its advice.

The Executive Council was to assist and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions in relation to such matters (other than finance and maintenance of public order) *as might be specified by the Governor*. Thus, the Executive Council was to advise the Governor whenever he chose to be advised, and was much less than a council of ministers. The Executive Council, with a fixed strength of five would hold office during the pleasure of the Governor who would allocate portfolios among the councillors. There was no provision for responsibility of the council to the Interim Body.

The commissioner was to fix the date for the constitution of village councils for the villages, range councils for village groups

and tribal councils for the tribes. The Interim Body might, with the approval of the Governor, make by-laws regulating 'the constitution of the village, Range and Tribal Councils, the powers exercisable by the Councils in trying the disputes involving breaches of customary laws and usages, and the powers of such councils in other matters.' These provisions were in addition to, and not in supersession of, the Naga Hills Tuensang Area (Administration) Regulation of 1957. On the *administrative* level, the adviser to the Governor of Assam on tribal areas was in charge of supervising the administrative arrangement until December 1961, when a secretary for Nagaland was appointed to the Governor of Assam. After Nagaland's attainment of full statehood, this office was merged with that of the secretary to the Governor.

Politically, some significance was attached to the election of two Aos to the two prestigious posts in the interim administration – P. Shilu Ao as chairman of the Executive Council and Imkongliba Ao as president of the Interim Body. Zasokie represented the Angamis in the Executive Council while Hokise Sema represented the Semas.

When the Nagaland Transitional Provision Regulation was passed, the estimate of the Government of India was to work the scheme for three years. But in the second session of the Interim Body a resolution was adopted deciding to set up an eight-member committee to draft the amendment of the Regulation.[14] Shilu Ao, chairman of the Executive Council, declared that within six months the Regulation had proved unworkable, putting restrictions and obstructions in the way of the Executive Council:

> We are expected to function as Provisional Government. But the Regulation provides only for advisory powers. The Interim Body has now been turned into a powerless body and curbs on its efficient functioning could only be removed by amending the Regulation.

The increasing trouble caused by the underground and the murder (in January 1962) of Imkongliba Ao, president of the Interim Body, for some time diverted the attention of the cooperationist Nagas. On 11 April 1962, the President of

India issued the Nagaland Security Regulation of 1962 for the suppression of subversive activities, maintenance of essential supplies and services, and control of military requirements. In August 1962 Nehru moved in Parliament the Bills for the 13th Amendment of the Constitution and for the creation of the state of Naga-land. The Bills were signed by the President on 4 September 1962. On 1 December 1963 the state of Nagaland was inaugurated by President Radhakrishnan at Kohima. The chairman of the erstwhile Executive Council, P. Shilu Ao, became the Chief Minister.

In 1964 elections were held to the Nagaland Assembly. Two parties appeared in the field. The now retired Naga civil servant, Kevichusa Angami, formed the Democratic Party, pledging peace and 'lasting good relationship with the Government of India'. The other party was set up by Shilu Ao, and called the Naga Nationalist Organisation, which was committed to Naga-land's continuity in India. Out of forty-six seats in the Assembly, Kevichusa's Democratic Party wrested twelve. The other seats, some uncontested, went to the Naga Nationalist Organisation which, however, got all the seats in 1965, after the Democratic Party suddenly resigned *en bloc*.

Peace Politics

In 1964 further efforts by the Naga Church leaders led to the establishment of a peace mission comprising B.P. Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam, Jayaprakash Narayan, the Sarvodaya leader, and Rev. Michael Scott, the British host of Phizo. Peace was formally announced on 4 September 1964, and a peace observers' team with some Sarvodaya workers was established at Kohima. A bit of legal fiction was indulged in by all the parties concerned. There was no 'agreement' between the Government of India and the underground. But commitments to peace were given to the peace mission by both of them. The correspondence between the Government of India and the peace mission mentioned 'cessation of military operation' on the part of the government and 'cessation of hostilities' on the part of 'the underground'. The correspondence between the peace mission and the hostile Nagas mentioned 'ceasefire'

on the part of the Nagaland Federal Government and the Government of India. The underground Nagas evidently tried to give the agreement an international character and sought unsuccessfully to raise the subsequent negotiations to the level of international meetings. Anyway, the ban on the NNC and the Federal Government was lifted. But five rounds of talks could not bring forth any tangible political result, though peace continued to reign with occasional interruptions. The elections of February 1967 were, as a result, largely successful. In the words of Dr M. Aram, chairman of the Nagaland Peace Centre and a crucial outsider in Naga politics, 'After the elections the State Government has emerged as a strong institution with a renewed mandate from the people.'[15]

Like war, peace in appropriate cases is an instrument of political struggle. For the first time after Independence, the Naga tasted the benefits of settled life. The underground occasionally resorts to violence, but that is not quantitatively very different from what the rest of India occasionally experiences from the communalists or the naxalites. What is most important, however, is that Naga politics, both open and underground, has followed the course of all-India politics. It is faction-ridden.

It is of course a contention of this author that, like all-India politics, Naga politics was never based on any monolithic unity. The first Naga National Council of 1946 was expected to be an all-Naga platform. But it was very much an elite or middle class organisation dominated by the advanced Ao. Phizo, with a middle class background but personally frustrated, was able to unify most of the other Naga groups, through an appeal to tribalism and with the weight of the powerful Angami village of Khomoma. His desperate bid to retain control led him to a major mistake, namely, the gradual alienation of the non-Angami Nagas.

It is the author's contention that, because of the ethnocentric character of Phizo's movement, there was never a 'national front' of all Nagas under him. Indeed, Phizo had destroyed the middle class base of the NNC on which the concept of a Naga nationality could be built. His militancy started in 1953 through an alliance with the unadministered Chang who formed the Free Government and a Naga Home Guard. The Semas came to an 'alliance' with the Free Government after forming their

own Naga Safe Guards. After a long resistance Phizo recognised the Sema leader, Kaito, as the chief of a united underground army.[16] In May 1962 Kaito was in the news when with a band of 200 volunteers he dashed through north Cachar, came near Haflong for two days and then crossed into Pakistan. He went to London, had a stormy interview with Phizo[17] and, in the same year, returned to the Naga hills through Manipur with a huge store of modern arms and ammunition which he only partly surrendered to the Federal Government. The Federal Government led by his own elder brother, Kughato Sukhai, as prime minister, found him inconvenient. He was therefore made the defence minister, while the Federal Government's army was placed under the command of General Mowu Angami. Yet a major part of the 2000-strong army, made of the Sema, remained personally loyal to him. In 1964 his defence portfolio was taken over by Kughato. Kaito denounced the Federal Government and in 1967 reportedly looted its treasury by using some government cars.[18] He ordered that villagers should pay to the underground not more than Rs 10.00 a year. Soon Sukhato (Sughato, Seato) Swu, the Sema president of the Federal Government, came in for bitter criticism and resigned. Mhasiu Angami replaced him and a year later proclaimed the presidential form of the Federal Government, having taken over prime minister Kughato's powers. But when Mowu Angami's term of three years as general was over, he was given an extension of one year, keeping away Zuheto Sema, the next in seniority, from office. Zuheto after some time was reportedly kidnapped by Kaito and released after a few weeks, after which he started moving away from the Federal Government. On 7 August 1968 Kaito was murdered in the Kohima market in broad daylight.

This was perhaps the last folly that Phizo's men could commit. Most of the fighting Sema left the Federal Government. On 2 November 1968, Sukhato and Kughato proclaimed the formation of the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland at Zungti in the Sema country. Zuheto joined them. Soon Mhasieu Angami was kidnapped. After his release he left politics. The Federal Government was again split by the rivalry between Chumbemo Mury, Mhasieu's successor and a Lhota, and Zashie Huire, the next president and a Chakhesang.

It would be naive to assert that, as the NNC dominated by the moderate Ao disapproved of Phizo's adventurism, the latter propped up the Federal Government with militant Sema leaders at its head. And that as the Sema leaders refused to toe Phizo's line, they had to break away and therefore the Federal Government continued to be controlled by Phizo's men. Such an assertion suggests that the underground was split into: the Ao dominating the NNC, the Sema controlling the Revolutionary Government and the Angami dictating to the Federal Government, though insignificant personalities from other groups occasionally headed the last. The last 'Government' to crop up in Nagaland was a reincarnation of the Hongkin Government of 1954, which had broken away from the Revolutionary Government in the Chang area in 1971.

This would only be part of the picture. Among the imponderables are the Ao's proverbial individualism, the Sema's righteous arrogance, the growing disillusionment of the Angami with Phizo and the role of the government's patronage. Though T.N. Angami's chief ministership was politically inconsequential, P. Shilu Ao and Hokishe Sema are believed to have made an immense contribution to the growth of dissension in Phizo's ranks. The growth of administration in the remote corners of Nagaland has succeeded in alienating the smaller groups from the Phizoites to such an extent that violent activities have been virtually driven to the Manipur Naga areas, where they are sustained only by a demand for the integration of that area with Nagaland.

Standing outside the Nagaland state government, the Federal Government and the Revolutionary Government, was a powerful personality, Kevichusa Angami, who persistently preached the need for arriving at a political settlement with the NNC.[19] In 1964, his Democratic Party emerged as the only opposition party in the Assembly though it was dissolved shortly thereafter. In the 1969 elections, he formed the United Front. The party had a modest success but Kevichusa himself lost. In the mid-term elections of 1971, he defeated the Union minister, S.C. Jamir (Ao), and won the only Lok Sabha seat from Nagaland.

Factionalism was no monopoly of the underground. It haunts the government too. What is important to note is that the two evils often interact. Many officials of the state government had an underground background. In 1966 Shilu Ao, leading the

Nagaland government since 1960, was surprisingly defeated in the Assembly by the only party therein, namely, his own Naga Nationalist Organisation (NNO). The Ao members' reaction was to walk out of the Assembly in a body of 12.[20] T.N. Angami, the erstwhile Speaker of the Assembly, succeeded him only to make room for Hokishe Sema in 1969.[21] In 1971, after S.C. Jamir was defeated in the Lok Sabha elections, he suddenly became vocal about the failures of the administration and advocated the return of Phizo and the opening of direct talks with him.[22] Such developments were, however, unlikely to set any new trend in the state's politics. But Phizo baiting seemed to be the easiest weapon for all politicians at the ramparts of power.

In 1968 the Government of India took the public position that, though negotiations with anyone on the Naga question might not be ruled out, all talks could be held only by the legitimate state government of Nagaland. The implication was that the Naga problem was a *local* issue and the sovereignty of the Government of India was indisputable. The stand was strengthened by the victory of the NNO in the 1969 elections. But in September, when the Nagaland Assembly opened, a section of the NNO started blaming the Chief Minister for his alleged 'failure' to bring about a political settlement. The Chief Minister in turn dropped some of his cabinet colleagues including T.N. Angami. Jamir and Angami launched a campaign within the NNO, claiming that the Naga political question was yet unsolved. It was for the Government of India to reopen talks with the NNC in association with Naga leaders who had the confidence of the public, for the political solution of the Naga problem. The state government would assist the talks and dissociate itself from the Federal Government, the Revolutionary Government and the Hongkhin Government.[23] The target was obviously the Chief Minister, for revival of the NNC was a daydream. The upshot was the formation of a United Democratic Front which included the erstwhile United Front and the NNO defectors.

China and the Church

In 1961, for the first time the possibility of China's involvement in Naga politics was mentioned by R. Suissa (then a Naga

Congressite MP from Manipur and a rebel after his defeat in the 1962 elections). In a communication to the Government of India he called for a prompt solution of the Naga problem. But it was only after the October 1962 Chinese aggression that Phizo made the first contact with China. In December 1966, a resolution was adopted at the plenary session of the NNC, informing the neighbours including China of the Naga policy of 'non-alignment' and asking Phizo to expedite 'the national issues'. Soon the presidentship of the Federal Government passed from Scato Swu to Mhasiu Angami, a Phizoite. The road to China was opened.

It has already been mentioned that the Baptist Church of the Naga hills was completely Indianised by 1955. Most of the Naga pastors came from the Ao community. Right from 1955, the Baptist Church threw its weight in favour of peace. The hard-core Phizo faction found the Church's gesture inconvenient and told it to keep aloof from politics. This necessitated the search for a secular foundation for the movement. China's hostility to India, if not its communism, was expected to supply this. The prospects were, however, not very bright in a state like Nagaland. When the first batch of underground volunteers returned from China in February 1968, the Naga Baptist Church Council, including its secretary, Rev. Longri Ao, denounced the action of the rebels as not authorised by the Naga people's consent. Their statement emphasised the suppression of religion in Tibet and other parts of China. The persistence of the underground movement, in spite of the strong disapproval of the Church, showed that the movement was secular in character. But the movement was certainly heading towards a blind alley, as was evident from the desperate and inconsistent activities of its leaders. In December 1968, Imkongmeren Ao, vice-president of the NNC, suddenly claimed that he had received a letter from the US president-elect, Nixon, long before his election but after the visit of a Central Intelligence Agency man to Nagaland, promising US help to the underground. The claim was repudiated by US sources and Ao became silent. This was considered as a move to create confusion among the pro-China Nagas as well as the general public.

Homecoming

The creation of Nagaland under the control of the Ministry of External Affairs, operating through the Governor of Assam in his discretionary capacity, was subject to some controversy in Parliament. It was considered a concession to the underground pretensions to separate statehood, but in practical terms there was more of an administrative anomaly in it than political consideration. The Naga Hills Tuensang Area was created as a part B tribal area, under the control of the central government, which dealt with the area as a 'political' affair.

As early as 1772, Warren Hastings had created the Secret and Political Affairs Department with three branches: (1) secret, dealing with government transactions on war, negotiations and missions abroad; (2) political, dealing with correspondence with Residents and Political Agents in Indian states, managed territories and non-Regulation provinces; and (3) foreign, dealing with European powers. In 1842 the name was changed to the Foreign Department, managed directly by the Governor-General. In 1914 it was further changed to the Foreign and Political Department which, after 1935, was split into: (1) the External Affairs Department and (2) the Political Department. Frontier administration was traditionally under the External Affairs Department which, after the transfer of power, was for some time called the Department of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations. The administration of the part B tribal areas was initially vested in this department.[24]

The supervision of Nagaland by the External Affairs Department somewhat anomalously continued after the attainment of statehood by Nagaland because of the 1961 agreement of Prime Minister Nehru with the leaders of Naga People's Convention, and ended only on 1 July 1972, when the state was placed under the charge of the Home Ministry.[25]

Notes and References

1 S.J. Duncan's paper (abridged), 'Naga Hills Administration – Reminiscences', presented at a seminar on Nagaland, organised by the Shillong Political Science Association, Shillong, 1969.

2 Constituent Assembly of India, *North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas subcommittee, Vol. II. (Evidence), Part I, Lushai, North Cachar, Garo, Mikir and Naga Hills*, Delhi, 1947, p. 204.

3 Ibid., p. 238. The secretary of the subcommittee wrote, 'Mr Kevichusa moreover was the gentleman who had visited North Cachar Hills Sub-Division (with a Naga Veterinary Assistant) to suggest to the Nagas there to ask for a revision of boundaries and take up the attitude that the Naga National Council at Kohima was the only representative body and that they had nothing to discuss at North Cachar' (p. 236). Apparently the Bardoloi subcommittee mistook Lungalong's identity.

4 Ibid., p. 188. The appeal to tribalism is evident here, cf. *The Report of the Committee on Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks*, Delhi, 1960, p. 171. 'The principle of election is contrary to tribal tradition in most places and the core of the Tribal Council depends on certain recognised leaders of the village who in practice listen to anybody who cares to attend their meetings.'

5 George Paterson, 'The Naga Revolt' in *The Spectator*, 14 September 1962. No account of the episode is, however, available in Gandhi's biographies.

6 *The Assam Tribune*, 13 August 1953.

7 Ibid., 10 September 1953.

8 Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, Shillong, 1961, p. 55.

9 Ibid.

10 For a summary of the constitution of the Central Government of Nagaland, see Elwin, op. cit., pp. 56–57; Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, p. 159.

11 Elwin, op. cit., p. 56; Prakash Singh, op. cit., pp. 98–99.

12 Though Elwin commends the army's record as 'singularly clear of the conventional crimes of war' (ibid., p. 60), at least the shooting of Dr Haralu in 1956 created a strong reaction, vide P.D. Stracey, *Nagaland Nightmare*, Bombay, 1968, pp. 63–64 and 141.

13 The Naga Hills Tuensang Area Regulation of 1957.

14 21 September 1961.

15 M. Aram, 'Evolution of Naga Politics', paper submitted at a seminar on Nagaland at Shillong, organised by the Shillong Political Science Association.

16 Stracey, op. cit., p. 311; Prakash Singh, op. cit., p. 99.

17 vide *The Statesman*, 19 July 1987.

18 vide *The Statesman*, 14 July 1967. Use of government cars by underground factions during peace was not uncommon.

19 vide *The Statesman*, 6 December 1967.

20 Stracey, op. cit., pp. 302–305.
21 Phizo's niece, Rano Shaiza (Iralu), contested against Angami in the elections and lost. She successfully challenged his election in the High Court of Assam and Nagaland, but the Supreme Court upheld Angami's election.
22 *The Statesman*, 26 March 1971.
23 *The Assam Tribune*, 15 October 1971.
24 The Indian Institute of Public Administration, *The Organisation of the Government of India*, Bombay, 1958, pp. 57–58.
25 The Administrative Reforms Committee recommended (in the *Report on The Machinery of the Government of India and its Procedure of Work*, September 1968) that Nagaland should be with the Home Ministry, though the arrangement 'should not come in the way of the Prime Minister, by virtue of his (her) position, handling certain sensitive issues in this area' (p. 80).

CHAPTER 10

Mizo Politics

The vast tract of hilly land, lying between Chittagong and the Irawaddy valley to the south of Cachar and Imphal, has been inhabited by people who were broadly grouped by Grierson in the Kuki–Chin linguistic family. Their nomadic way of life was the greatest obstacle to political stabilisation. As the hills were increasingly brought under British control, four administrative units emerged – the Chittagong Hill Tract, the South Lushai Hills District, the North Lushai Hills District, and the Chin hills. The first two regions were initially put within Bengal. In 1898 the southern and northern parts of the so-called Lushai hills were united and put in Assam. The Chin hills of Burma could never be effectively controlled and, at the time of transfer of power in Burma and India, a small tract of territory remained actually 'unadministered' between them.

However, the territorial demarcations were never accepted by the people. The separation of Burma from India in 1937, the partition of India in 1947 and the extension of administration over the entire Indian part of the area completely stopped their pristine mobility, which had begun to be curtailed from the time of the imposition of British rule. On the other hand, since the British days the different groups were slowly losing their sub-ethnic identities to the extent that, in the late British period, the census reports started classifying them broadly into Lushai, Kuki, Pawi, Lakher and Hmar. Almost the entire population in and around the major administrative centres of Aijal and Lungleh were designated as Lushai, their immediate neighbours on the south as Pawi, and the inhabitants of the southeastern corner of the district as Lakher. Stray groups of people on the northern side of the district were called Hmar and the inhabitants of the southern hills of Manipur were given the name of Kuki. The benefits of administration and Church education went mainly to the people of the northern and the central parts, and the Lushai emerged as the most advanced

group, followed by the Hmar. It was from these two sections that the leadership of the Mizo Union emerged with a clearly economic programme of fighting the vested interests of the chiefs. The movement cut across sub-ethnic boundaries and the vested interests which reorganised themselves.

The most convenient weapon in the hands of the 'traditional leadership' was an appeal to the 'traditions' of the hill people, and that included ethnic distinctions. The internal contradictions of the Mizo society, however, swept away the limits of 'tribalism'. 'At the end of the war when the talk of Indian independence was in the air', wrote a Mizo Union veteran, 'the Mizos like the Nagas would have demanded the Mizo independence but for one reason they did not do so.'[1] The so-called Mizo independence as well as the Crown Colony could only imply the perpetuation of chiefship, which the emergent middle class desperately wanted to be done away with. On the other hand, the Mizo Union reflected the typical integrationist aspiration of the middle class when it chose the new name (Mizo: *Mi* meaning man, *zo* meaning hill) in preference to 'Lushai'.

At its first general assembly held in September 1946, the Mizo Union decided to boycott the 'District Conference' of the British superintendent of the district and chose to join India, with the right to review the merger after ten years. It is interesting to note that T. Sakhrie, the joint secretary of the Naga National Council, was present at the meeting.[2] The Mizo Union's boycott of the District Conference led to the latter's collapse by the following October.

The process thus started led Mizo politics a long way. Its moderate old guard, including the founder president, Pachhunga (Hmar), and the second president, Lalheima (Lushai), was obviously under the influence of the superintendent (less discreet than the deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills District). At a meeting of the Mizo Union Council on 6 November 1946, Lalheima was replaced, on the apparent ground of educational inadequacy, by Khawting Khuma, one of the early Mizo graduates (an M.A. in history) from Tripura. The secretaryship of the Mizo Union also passed to another Mizo (Bawichhuaka, a Hmar) from Lakhimpur in Cachar district. The kingmaker appeared to be the president of the Mizo Union. South Lushai hills, Saprawngna, and the Mizo Union turned to be a militant,

anti-chief and integrationist organisation. It appears from the evidence of Bawichhuaka before the Bardoloi subcommittee that these Mizos from outside the district were the greatest advocates of the district's integration with India.[3]

Lalheima challenged the constitutionality of his ouster, and at his request the superintendent seized the union's fund. When the Bardoloi subcommittee reached Aijal, the district headquarters, the superintendent practically blamed it for having engineered the transfer order impending on him in aid of the Khuma group. He had taken steps to revive the District Conference. As Pachhunga told the subcommittee, he had a meeting with the Governor after which the Mizo Union agreed to participate in the conference.[4] But because of the disproportionate representation of the chiefs in it, the union on 5 April 1947[5] decided to abstain from the election which was held on April 14. Between 200 and 300 'commoners' participated in the election. According to the schedule prepared by the superintendent, the two rival groups of Mizo Unionists presented themselves together before the Bardoloi subcommittee. But the polarisation was not yet complete. In both groups there were supporters of 'independence', if after ten years. All of them wanted safeguards from exploitation by the plains people.

The ten-year association proposal that had been advanced in the Naga and the Mizo hills at the time of the transfer of power had a background to it. In Burma, where the Chin and Shan chiefs had been extremely powerful, the British government first floated the idea of the tentative association to which the Burmese nationalists had to agree later. This, along with the appeal to ethnic identity, was the basis of the demand for the Mizos' union with Burma. The superintendent of the Mizo hills was himself in sympathy with the demand; in fact, when asked by the Bardoloi subcommittee if he thought that the Mizos could exist as an independent nation, he had said that they might join Burma. The paradox of the position, however, lay in the existence of a larger number of people who identified themselves as Mizos on the Indian side of the border but outside the district. As it happened, the pull of India was greater than that of Burma.

On 20 July 1947, however, the dissident Mizo Unionists led by Lal Biak Thanga (claimed to be the first M.A. of the district), founded the United Mizo Freedom Organisation with

the object of joining Burma.[6] But the programme was soon to be given up in the changing situation and on August 14, the accredited leaders of the Mizo political parties held a meeting at Aijal to accept the *fait accompli* of the Lushai hills' inclusion in independent India, with the ten-year stipulation, and to demand the continuation of the Chin Hills Regulation and the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation.

The pace of social change reflected in the ascendancy of the Mizo Union brought in its wake new tensions. The superintendent also blessed a new organisation led by the Chin chiefs (Chinzahs and Hlychos) in the southeastern part of the district, which was called the Pawi–Lakher Tribal Union. It had no link with MacDonald Khar-Kongor's Tribal Union but it had a similarity of outlook with the United Mizo Freedom Organisation. It obtained from the Bardoloi subcommittee a regional council within the district. Bardoloi initiated moves to set up an interim local council in the hills, pending the constitution of the district councils. But the Mizo Union grew impatient. On 6 October 1947, the weekly *Assam Tribune* reported a meeting of the Mizo Union, held on 1 October 1947, where the district superintendent, L.L. Peters, told the Mizo Union that the Mizos' future was in India. Burma was severing connections with the British Empire. The British officials in the hill districts could, obviously, no longer encourage any talk of merger with Burma. More significant, however, was Peters' sermon on Mizo unity:

> The main reason for this difference of opinion is that some of your more sensible and reasonable leaders who have experience of years and close association with the administrative machinery of the district, wish to pursue a policy which would not have brought about a conflict with the chiefs.... The policy, however, did not find favour with some of the more irresponsible and extreme elements whose main idea is to do away with the administrative machinery, in which the chiefs play an important part, and to replace it with some other form of government, which they call democratic, in which the people will have all the power.[7]

The conference decided upon starting a non-cooperation movement if the district council was not set up before the end of November. It demanded the abolition of the oppressive practices of: (1) building the chiefs' houses with free labour; (2) payment

of paddy tax to village chiefs; (3) bringing of disputes to village chiefs for trial; and (4) flesh tax on the wild animals hunted by the people.

The Government of Assam, however, hesitated to introduce such a drastic legislation as demanded by the Mizo Union and, in the middle of 1948, the union's third president, Khuma, was packed off to the northern frontier on a respectable government job. In late 1948, therefore, the civil disobedience movement started. It mainly took the form of riotous assaults on the chiefs. Many non-Lushai groups having no chiefship among themselves or under Lushai chiefs naturally indulged in excesses. They were pacified when in January 1949, the adviser to the Governor on tribal affairs visited the district and repeated the promise of implementation of the Sixth Schedule at an early date. As a result, the Lushai Hills District alone got an advisory council prior to the formation of the district council.

After the Mizo Union secured the district council and the Tribal Union got the Pawi–Lakher Regional Council, cooperation developed between the erstwhile opponents. When the Eastern India Tribal Union was sponsored at the initiative of the siem-controlled Khasi National Durbar, the UMFO joined it. Though the Mizo Union played host to the EITU at Aijal[8] there was little evidence of its identification with the EITU. It was at the time of the second election to the district council in 1957 that signs of rift were apparent in the Mizo Union. After the abolition of chiefship in the district, charges of malpractices in the distribution of lease on urban lands were levelled against the Mizo Union. The liberal compensation granted by the state government, on the other hand, rehabilitated the chiefs. The alliance of the new Chief Minister, B.P. Chaliha, with the EITU estranged him from the Mizo Union.

In 1959, there occurred in the Mizo hills the dreaded *mawtum*[9] famine resulting from the flowering of bamboo and a tremendous increase in the number of rats. The poor communications system in the district hampered the supply of government relief. The estrangement between the Chief Minister and the Mizo Union had meanwhile reached a bitter stage. Chaliha told the author in an interview that he had received charges of corruption against the district council. A part of the relief items was channelled through government officials. The

Mizo Union demanded that the whole relief operation be carried through the district council. Soon the government charged the district council with non-cooperation.[10] With official blessings a Mizo National Famine Front was set up in 1960 by some former followers of the Mizo Union. Relief turned out to be a salient form of patronage in the famine-stricken hills. In 1960, both the Mizo Union and the UMFO joined the APHLC. With the appearance of the Congress–APHLC rift, the Mizo National Famine Front turned into a political party on 28 October 1961, and called itself the Mizo National Front. Lal Denga, a cashiered clerk of the district council, and Vanlwama, the founder secretary of the Mizo Union, became respectively its president and secretary.[11] About the same time, most of the followers of the Mizo Union (Right Wing) joined the Mizo Union defector, A. Thanglura, to form the first Congress unit in the district. Both parties lost the 1962 elections in which two Mizo Unionists and one UMFO follower won.

One of the Mizo Union MLAs refused to comply with the APHLC directive on resignation and joined the Congress in October 1962. The by-elections to the other two seats went in favour of the MNF, marking the end of the APHLC in the district. On 10 June 1963, the disillusioned Mizo Union held a convention at Aijal and demanded a Mizo state, including the district and the contiguous Mizo-inhabited areas of Assam, Tripura and Manipur, within India. Obviously, the demand for a united hill state had been lost and the Mizo Union wanted to steal the thunder from the UMFO and the MNF. Under the auspices of the Mizo Union an all-party meeting was held in January 1965 at Churachandpur in Manipur, and the demand for the unification of all Mizos (including the Kuki) was raised.

The demand for Mizo unification has been a handy issue in Mizo politics. One hears complaints among the Hmars that the dominant Lushai population in the district do favour it for fear of being outnumbered by other groups. This demand made the Mizo Union choose India in 1947, and brought two 'outsider' Mizos to top offices in the party. In 1965 one of them, Bawichhuaka, a Hmar, replaced Saprawngna as the chief executive member of the Mizo District Council.

Lal Denga's trump card was his demand for union with the Mizos of Burma and Pakistan. The strategy made him the hero

of romantic reaction and mobilised the extremist elements. The India–Pakistan war of 1965 opened up his opportunities. At the end of the year, the government decided to reinforce the armed forces stationed in the district. While Lal Denga was returning from Pakistan he was arrested but was released, reportedly through the intervention of the Chief Minister, after he had given an undertaking of good conduct.[12] On 24 February 1966, the Governor in his address to the Legislative Assembly expressed satisfaction at the overall law and order situation. An opposition leader from Cachar, Tarapada Bhattacharya, made a specific reference the next day to the deteriorating situation in the Mizo hills. Throughout February 1966, there were reports of MNF activity – the carrying of arms and organising of hostile propaganda in the district. The MNF was telling the people how afraid the government was of it. The campaign carried some conviction inasmuch as some of the MNF leaders had hitherto been enjoying government patronage. Surprisingly, the authorities did not consider it necessary to publish the understanding given by Lal Denga. The All India Radio broadcasts, to the effect that Pakistan and China were helping the MNF, paradoxically helped the MNF which had assured the people that it would obtain such help. The MNF balloon was pricked when the Central government controlled Assam Rifles sent its 18th Battalion into the district as reinforcement. On February 28, Lal Denga urged the Prime Minister and the Assam Chief Minister to defer the movement until he had met them.[13]

Lal Denga was possibly playing for time, for at midnight, armed MNF volunteers attacked government buildings, kept the deputy commissioner under detention and virtually took over control of the district. The district was declared a disturbed area. The situation, however, was so tense that the district was handed over to the army. The first offensive counteracted, the army moved into the villages for the clearance operation. Lal Denga was reportedly one of the MNF leaders who fled to Pakistan. Conflicting reports about his movements appeared in the newspapers. In 1967 the army started regrouping the villages and this led to the fall of the MNF influence. Its claim of having the support of the majority of the Mizos was always in doubt. At the most it could attract a major section of the Lushai

for a short duration. Most of the Hmars and Pawis suspected it to be cherishing a plan of Lushai dominance. In April 1964 when the MNF established its branch in the Lawngtai village in the Pawi–Lakher region, many Pawis considered it an encroachment on their domain. The name 'Chin National Front' was also meant for offering a 'national' alternative to the cause of the Mizo National Front. In 1967, a leader of the Chin National Front and chief executive member of the Pawi–Lakher Regional Council, L. Chinza, wrote that 'the MNF only earns hatred in PLR'.[14]

Ethnic politics has its own paradox. Even Pawi–Lakher politics had it. In October 1963, shortly before the regional council elections, the Tribal Union was split on the question of nomination and a Mara Freedom Party was formed. The Tribal Union leader, H. Kiautuma, the erstwhile chief executive member of the regional council, was defeated by another Pawi, L. Chinza, who took the lead in founding the Chin National Front (CNF) for reuniting the Pawi and the Lakher. Kiautuma formed the regional unit of the MNF. By the 1970 elections to the regional council, the CNF virtually disintegrated to swell the ranks of the Congress.

A word about the Mizo Church would be in order here. It has been pointed out that a major support to the Mizo Union came from the local pastors. In 1965 the Church came out in opposition to the hostile postures of the MNF. On 1 August 1967 a declaration was issued by the Mizo Presbyterian Church opposing the armed insurrection of the MNF against which the *Bulletin No. 1* of August 1967 issued by the Mizo underground 'Minister, Information, Publicity and Broadcasting' warned the Church that 'the Mizo Government will not tolerate any church or organisation which does not accept the present Government'.

Revival of the Congress

The gains of the Mizo crisis went to the Congress while the Mizo Union was the loser. The MNF was born as a rival to the Mizo Union and won the sympathies of all the disgruntled elements. In the Mizo District, the Congress assembled several MNF supporters including the dispossessed families of chiefs. The Congress owed its success in the district council elections

(10: 9) in April 1970, to its open advocacy for a 'political settlement'[15] with the MNF. In those elections, allegations of unfair practices and intimidation were openly hurled at each other. But the Mizo Union was generally found to have done well in the regrouped villages while the Congress gained the most in the remote areas where the MNF is supposed to be still active. The paradox of Congress–MNF relations was that the Assam Provincial Congress Committee was firmly committed to the Mizo hills' continuation in Assam, while the MNF had given no indication of changing its stance. The Congress, obviously and perhaps correctly, thinks that the MNF will die a natural death. But the Congress has to encounter a formidable rival in the Mizo Union. Factionalism within the party is a no less difficult problem for the Congress. In April 1970 it came to control the Mizo Hills District Council. But in the course of a year the executive council was toppled twice. The second time most of the Mizo Congress members led by Dengthuama, a former Mizo Unionist, joined the Mizo Union to pass a vote of no-confidence against the chief executive member, C.F. Nghina, who was replaced by a veteran Mizo Unionist, Ch. Chhunga, and a coalition executive committee was formed. Nghina and two others remained aligned to A. Thanglura, the Mizo member of the Assam cabinet. On April 14 the coalition passed a resolution demanding a Mizoram state within India. The resolution also called for the unification of all Mizo inhabited areas.

It was the Pataskar Commission which, in the wake of the MNF disturbances, had first floated the idea of the constitution of the Mizo Hills District into a Union Territory. In July 1971 the Government of India accepted the proposal. While the district council welcomed it, the state Congress was clearly unhappy. With the blessings of the Mizo minister, Mizo students in Shillong (who depended on government assistance) staged a demonstration in the capital under the banner of a Mizo Students' Convention in defence of democracy and in opposition to the Union Territory proposal. Among those who addressed the demonstrators was the minister's wife. The meeting, according to a resolution passed there, refused to accept the proposal for a Union Territory even as a 'stepping stone'. It called upon the Central government to find and expedite 'an alternative solution that will give the real answer to the problems and adequately

serve the interest of all the Mizo people, not only within the confines of the present district, but also the contiguous areas'. The meeting rejected 'any proposal or settlement that does not take into account the underground Mizos'. The resolution, however, did not demand full statehood but called upon the Central government to create an 'atmosphere in which peace talks could be held with the underground Mizos in arriving at a permanent and peaceful settlement' of the Mizo question. In effect the separation of the Mizo hills from Assam was opposed.[16] In the second week of September, a deputation of Congress (R) workers of the district met Indira Gandhi and asserted that they 'may even prefer the *status quo*.'[17] Indira Gandhi reportedly told them that the Centre had gone too far to retrieve its steps.[18]

The paradox of the situation can be understood only with reference to the known postures of the parties concerned. The ruling party of Assam, namely the Congress (R), has persistently opposed the disintegration of Assam but has generally been ineffective in the hills. The state unit of the united Congress, which had the rare distinction in north India of retaining the state under its control in the 1967 elections, wavered for a long time before throwing in its lot with Indira Gandhi. On the eve of the 1967 elections, some of the Congress units in the hills, with a view to counteracting the APHLC, had demanded a state for each hill district. The Khasi Hills Congress Committee even disaffiliated itself from the APCC. After the constitution of Meghalaya, which happened during the illness of Chief Minister B.P. Chaliha, the Assam Congress adopted a more reasonable attitude towards the hills and granted additional power to the Mikir and North Cachar District Councils. But, when Indira Gandhi promised full statehood to Meghalaya, the Congressite chief executive member of the Mikir Hills District Council declared his intention of demanding statehood for the Mikir hills. Earlier, on 2 October 1970, a memorandum demanding statehood and bearing the signature of a Mikir member of the Assam cabinet and eleven others had been submitted to the Prime Minister.

The state government was distressed. Chaliha's successor, M.M. Choudhuri, alleged in the Assembly that the Government of India had not taken the state government into confidence before making the announcement.[19] Moinul Huq Chaudhuri,

then a dissident member of the Assam Congress, threatened to start an agitation for the separation of Cachar from Assam. The new Chief Minister proved to be a greater manoeuvrer than his predecessor. The Mikir Congressites' demand for statehood had really been meant for the district council election and was soon forgotten.[20] Moinul Huq Chaudhuri joined the Union cabinet after the 1971 Lok Sabha elections, to be sacked a year later.

Notes and References

1 Ch. Saprawngna, 'Factors contributing to the Mizo Problem', *Tribal Mirror*, Karimgunj, 1967, vol. iii.

2 C. Palhira, 'Mizo Hills in the Indian Union', ibid., 1970, vol. vi.

3 Bardoloi subcommittee, *Evidence*, part 1. H.K. Bawichhuaka, who later became secretary of the Mizo Union, told the subcommittee that 'If the Lushai Hills choose to be independent, it means eternal severance with the other Mizo countries outside the Lushai Hills. If it goes to Burma, the same is the case. So the best interests of those living in the Lushai Hills is to be connected with India.' He demanded the return of the Mizo areas of Manipur and Burma to the district.

4 Ibid., p. 27.

5 C. Palhira, a founder member of the Mizo Union, writes that, 'Synchronising the visit of the subcommittee of the Constituent Assembly to Mizo Hills, Mr. A.Z. Phizo and other Naga leaders visited Mizo Hills again in April 1947.' (Palhira, op. cit.). Some other informants told the author that Phizo was introduced to Mizo politicians by Kevichusa whose wife was a Lushai. The account tallies with the Bardoloi subcommittee's report that Kevichusa visited the north Cachar hills when the subcommittee was there. According to Palhira, the visiting Nagas advocated a united Mizo–Naga movement.

6 L.F. Sailo's paper, 'Circumstances leading to the Reorganisation of Mizoram', submitted at a seminar on 'Reorganisation of North-East India' held in 1972, at the Union Christian College, Barapani, Khasi Hills.

7 *The Assam Tribune*, 5 October 1947.

8 *Supra*, chapter VII. After the ouster of Lalsawia by Saprawngna from the position of chief executive member of the Mizo District Council in 1954, the Mizo Union split. Lalsawia formed the Mizo Union (Right Wing) party.

9 In the northeast Indian hills bamboo flowering is believed to take place every fifty years, resulting in an influx of rats and destruction of crops.

10 Chaliha told the author in an interview (in October 1968), 'I don't trust the Mizo Union'. The Mizo Union leaders had equally strong views about him.

11 For the MNF case, see *Memorandum Submitted to the Prime Minister of India* by the Mizo National Front, General Headquarters, Aijal, Mizoram, dated 10 October 1965.

12 The Chief Minister at the Assam Congress Legislature Party meeting, 1 March 1966, evening.

13 *The Statesman*, 18 April 1966, report on 'What happened in the Mizo Hills'.

14 L. Chinza, *Few Memoranda from the Pawi–Lakher People from South Mizo District*, 1966–67, p. 31.

15 The president of the Mizo District Congress Committee said in Shillong on 22 July 1970, that he favoured a political settlement with the MNF.

16 *The Implanter* (Shillong weekly), 15 August 1971.

17 *The Shillong Times*, 11 September 1971. Congress (R) was the name of the party led by Mrs Indira Gandhi after the Congress split in 1969.

18 *The Statesman*, 16 September 1971.

19 *The Assam Tribune*, 12 November 1970.

20 In the 1971 Lok Sabha elections the APCC unofficially supported an independent Mikir, Bapuram Singnar, against G.G. Swell (both Christians). The All-India Congress Committee had, however, extended its support to the latter, an APHLC can- didate, who won. Soon the unsuccessful Mikir took a leading role in the movement for the merger of the Mikir hills with Naga- land. See *The Implanter*, 25 December 1971, letter to the editor.

CHAPTER 11

The Metamorphosis of a Frontier

Arunachal Pradesh is quite a poetic name for 'a hard country',[1] stretching over 32,269 square miles and having a population of nearly 47 lakhs with a density of about 15 per square mile (1971). There are, according to the 1961 census, 23 groups in the area belonging mainly to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family who entered the land at different periods from different directions. Elwin found among them 'a compelling likeness' in respect of agriculture, housing, lack of indigenous scripts (except of the Khampti) and their isolationist nature, though the differences are as remarkable in respect of dialects, dress, culture and religion.

When the British started drawing the Inner Line near the Himalayan foothills in 1875, their purpose was to bring 'under more stringent control the commercial relations of the British subjects with the Frontier Tribes', to prevent the operation of 'speculators in *cautchoue* (unvulcanised rubber) and spread of tea-gardens beyond the fiscal limits of settled areas, and to lay down rules for the possession of land and property beyond this line.'[2] The creation of the Dibrugarh Frontier Tract in 1882 was for filling up the gap between the administered areas and the Inner Line through the extension of 'political control'. In 1912 the Western Section of the North East Frontier Tract was created under the control of the deputy commissioner of Darrang.[3] In 1914 the Dibrugarh Frontier Tract was called the Central and Eastern Section of the North East Frontier Tract and a new tract – the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract – was created on its south. In 1919 the Western Section was renamed the Balipara Frontier Tract, and the Central and Eastern Section the Sadiya Frontier Tract. In 1943 the Tirap Frontier Tract was created out of Sadiya and Lakhimpur. In 1946 the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into two administrative units, Sela

and Subansiri. In 1948 under the North East Frontier (Internal Administration) Regulation, the Sadiya Frontier Tract was split into two districts: the Abor Hills and the Mishmi Hills.

The Bardoloi subcommittee recommended the merger of the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, along with that part of the Tirap Frontier Tract that had been taken over from the former (in 1943), with the regularly administered territories of Assam. The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, the subcommittee said, differed 'in no way from the surrounding plains', possessed none of the characteristics of the hill areas and 'need not be considered in relation to the problem of the hill tribes'. As regards the portions of this tract taken over into the Tirap Frontier Tract, 'the justification for continuing it as a Frontier area needs to be further examined and if no difficulty is likely to be caused by the inclusion of the Kachins and other tribes who live there in the Lakhimpur district the area should be merged in the district'. Accordingly, the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract was eliminated from the Sixth Schedule and paragraph 20, sub-paragraph 3 granted the Governor of Assam the power to exclude, with the sanction of the President of India, any area from part B tribal areas. A notification with the previous approval of the President of India by the Governor of Assam transferred further territories from the Balipara, Sadiya and Tirap Frontier Tracts to the Assam plains, bringing the boundaries of the tracts almost to the foot of the hills on the north, east and south.[4]

Administration

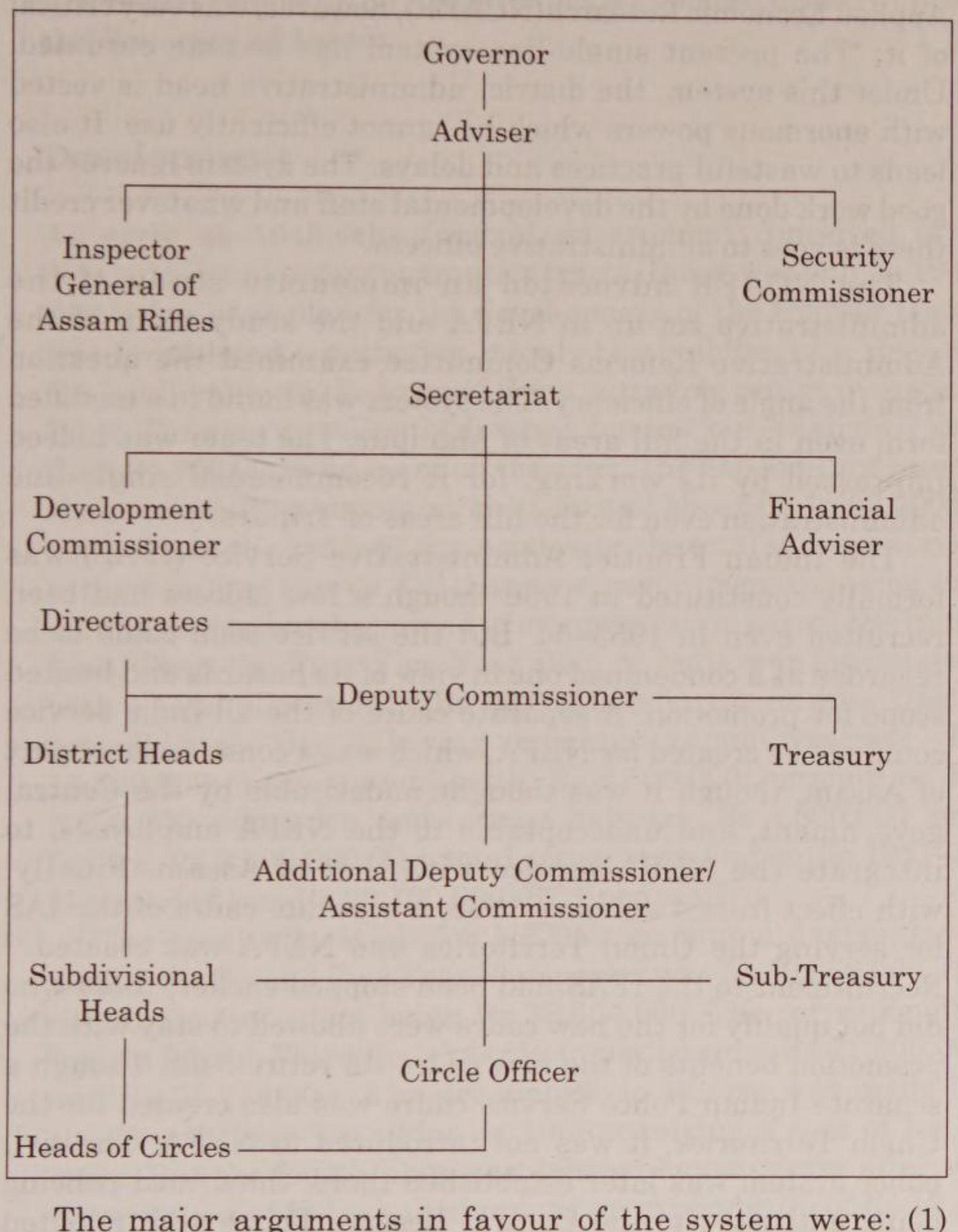
It was shortly after the transfer of power in India that China went communist (1949) and Tibet was recognised by India as an autonomous region within China (1950). The spadework for real administration actually started in this period. On 26 January 1950, the adviser to the Governor was allotted the charge of the administration of the North East Frontier Tract, though his secretariat was separated from the secretariat of the Tribal Affairs Department of the Government of Assam in June 1950. After the split, the civil servants of the Assam cadre were gradually replaced. In 1951 the Indian Trade Agent at Yatung (in Tibet) informed the Tibetan Foreign Bureau

that certain administrative steps, including the posting of an officer at Towang in northern Kameng, were being taken.[5] In 1962 the headquarters of the four tracts bordering Tibet were shifted from the foothills northward–from Sadiya to Tezu, from Pasighat to Along, from Kimin to Ziro and from Charduar to Rupa. The last was later shifted to Bomdi La.

In 1953 a plan to appoint a special commissioner for the frontier tracts administration was formulated, but given up due to Assam's resistance arising out of an apprehension that the tracts were being separated from the state. A full-scale administration of the area was inaugurated in 1954, with the promulgation of the North East Frontier Areas (Administration) Regulation of 1954, which laid down that the Balipara and Tirap Frontier Tracts and the Abor and the Mishmi Hills Districts, together with the Naga Tribal Area, would be collectively known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The administrative units were called frontier divisions. The Balipara Frontier Tract was split into two divisions–Kameng and Subansiri. Thus, six divisions came into being–Kameng (the westernmost), Subansiri (on its east), Siang (formerly the Abor Hills District, further east), Lohit (formerly the Mishmi Hills District, farthest east), Tirap (south of Lohit) and Tuensang (formerly the Naga Tribal Area, south of Tirap).[6] In late 1960, when the interim arrangement for Nagaland was decided upon, the adviser to the Governor was reverted to the advisory role and two commissioners were appointed to administer NEFA and the Naga Hills Tribal Area for a time.

There was a great increase in the allocation of government funds towards the NEFA administration, totalling about Rs 28 crore per annum. In no time, the administrative machinery expanded tremendously. In September 1968 the Administrative Reforms Commission's study group reported that 'in addition to the Adviser there are five Secretaries and one Judicial Officer in the NEFA Administration. Although there is no Chief Secretary, the Adviser performs the coordinating functions of this officer. He is, however, not in charge of any Secretariat Departments. The status of the Secretaries and Judicial Officer in this Administration is somewhat lower than IAS Under-Secretaries in the Central Government'. The number of secretaries in NEFA 'is in excess of the recommended maximum by two posts.'[7] The 'single-line' administration was structured as shown in Figure 11.1:

Figure 11.1: Single-line Administrative Structure



The major arguments in favour of the system were: (1) difficulties of communication within the district and with Shillong, (2) need for quick decisions, and (3) need for coordinating the political and administrative aspects of work. Elwin commended the single-line system 'which has greatly increased the efficiency of its work and the spirit of cooperation between its officers'.[8] The Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission under U.N. Dhebar (1960–61), on which Elwin served, considered the

system as 'exceptionally successful'.[9] The National Council of Applied Economic Research(NCAER), however, was very critical of it: 'The present single-line system has become outdated. Under this system, the district administrative head is vested with enormous powers which he cannot efficiently use. It also leads to wasteful practices and delays. The system ignores the good work done by the developmental staff and whatever credit there is goes to administrative officers.'[10]

The NCAER advocated an immediate study of the administrative set-up in NEFA and the study team of the Administrative Reforms Committee examined the question from the angle of efficiency. The system was found in a modified form even in the hill areas of Manipur. The team was indeed impressed by its working, for it recommended single-line administration even for the hill areas of Tripura.[11]

The Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS) was formally constituted in 1956 though a few officers had been recruited even in 1953–54. But the service soon came to be regarded as a condemned one in view of its hazards and limited scope for promotion. A separate cadre of the all-India service could not be created for NEFA, which was a constitutional part of Assam, though it was thought undesirable by the Central government, and unacceptable to the NEFA employees, to integrate the NEFA service with that of Assam. Finally, with effect from 4 January 1968, a separate cadre of the IAS for serving the Union Territories and NEFA was created.[12] Recruitment to the IFAS had been stopped earlier; those who did not qualify for the new cadre were allowed to stay with the promotion benefits of the new cadre till retirement. Though a separate Indian Police Service cadre was also created for the Union Territories, it was not introduced in NEFA. The civil police system was later established there, the armed policing being entrusted to the Central Reserve Police and indented armed police from other states. There was a considerable lack of coordination among the police authorities. The Assam Rifles, under the command of an inspector-general acting under the authority of the adviser, was deployed in the border areas, not only of NEFA, but also of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam, along with the Border Police Force, which was under the control of the Central government. Yet the Assam Rifles was entirely financed

by the NEFA administration. After the conversion of NEFA into Arunachal Pradesh, the Assam Rifles was placed directly under the Governor of Assam.

Development

As early as 1945, the Central government conceived of a development plan for the frontier tracts. But it was only in 1947 that a five-year plan for the development of the frontier tracts was formulated, envisaging mainly the building of a road up the Lohit valley to the town of Rima, a trading centre in eastern Tibet. The plan was silently dropped, but in 1948–49 slightly less than Rs 700,000 was spent on the area. The expenditure rose to about one million rupees in 1949–50 and about Rs 1,200,000 in 1950–51. In the 1951–52 financial year, the total sum spent rose to three million rupees. Till that time, government spending was mainly devoted to the spread of administration across the Inner Line. Then the First Five Year Plan of India was formulated, with a total allocation of Rs 30,000,000 for the frontier tracts, according to the following breakup: communications, Rs 13,500,000; medical and health, Rs 6,500,000; agriculture, Rs 3,200,000; education and cottage industry, Rs 4,800,000; and forests, Rs 2,000,000. The total actual spending in the 1951–56 plan period was Rs 20,100,000 (67.1 per cent).

The total allocation for NEFA's economic development during the Second Five Year Plan period was Rs 50,956,000, the actual amount spent being Rs 35,664,000. The corresponding figures for the Third Five Year Plan period were Rs 71,500,000 and Rs 73,239,000. A really ambitious scheme was made for the Fourth Five Year Plan in 1966 involving a sum of Rs 18 crore. But the fourth plan was delayed by two years after the Government of India had approved an expenditure of Rs 13.30 crore. In 1968 the NEFA administration came out with a plan involving Rs 23.68 crore. Of this amount, Rs 1.80 crore was earmarked for the settlement of retired army and Assam Rifles personnel and Bihari labourers in the vacant areas of NEFA. The administration hoped to secure Rs 8 to 10 crore from forest resources, the rest of the fund being expected from the Central government's coffers. The major heads of the allocation were:

agriculture and forest, Rs 486 lakh; cooperation and community development, Rs 234 lakh; power, Rs 186.25 lakh; roads and airstrips, Rs 613.75 lakh; education and health, Rs 536.14 lakh; industries, Rs 100.00 lakh.[13] The Government of India, however, sanctioned a total plan of Rs 17 crore. The emphasis in development was naturally on communications.

On 2 October 1952 the community development (CD) programme was introduced in NEFA with one community project in the Pasighat area of Siang district. On 2 October 1953 the National Extension Service (NES) block was introduced in Namsang area of Tirap District. The number of blocks opened during the first plan was five. By the end of the second plan, 19 NES blocks were functioning in NEFA. During the third plan 22 more CD blocks were added, raising the total number of CD/ NES blocks to 41. More blocks were opened in subsequent years. At the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan their number rose to 45, covering the entire region.

Following the recommendations of the Daying Ering Committee, on 1 August 1965 NEFA was transferred from the charge of the External Affairs Ministry to that of the Home Ministry. On 1 December its five divisions were converted into five administrative districts: Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. The Political Officers were redesignated as deputy commissioners. A district was further divided into subdivisions, placed under officers of the ranks of additional deputy commissioner, assistant commissioner, and extra assistant commissioner. The next and the lowest level of administration was the circle, under the circle officer.

According to the single-line system of administration, the administrative officers were in overall charge of development, functioning as *ex officio* block development officers. They were assisted by a team of extension workers in the block areas and, in technical matters, by the district officers of the development departments who also determined the feasibility or otherwise of the schemes/proposals for the blocks. The technical personnel in the community development department have grievances against this system.

Another peculiarity of the organisational framework of the programme was the incongruity between the community development blocks and the anchal samitis, arising out of the

absence of uniformity in the person to land ratio. Villages are sparsely populated in some areas and quite thickly populated in others. The administration planned to establish 50 anchal samitis by splitting the jurisdictions of some of the 15 community development blocks.

On 3 December 1969, panchayati raj in NEFA was inaugurated by the Governor of Assam at Shillong. The North East Frontier Agency Panchayat Raj Regulation (Regulation 3) of 1967, which made the provision for it, had earlier laid down a four-tier set-up–the village panchayat, the anchal samiti, the zilla parishad and, at the apex, the Agency Council to advise the Governor in the administration and development of NEFA. It should be made clear initially that panchayati raj was an administrative not a constitutional arrangement.[14] The Agency Council consisted of the Governor, the member of parliament from NEFA, the vice-presidents of the zilla parishads (whose presidents were the deputy commissioners), three representatives elected by each zilla parishad and the adviser to Governor *ex officio*. The membership of the various tiers above the village was elective. The village authorities appointed by the Governor, under the North East Frontier Administration of Justice Regulation of 1945, were given the status of gram panchayats.

The Bardoloi subcommittee found the level of consciousness among the people very low and did not recommend franchise for them, and the Constitution (Removal of Difficulties) Orders VII and VIII withheld from NEFA the right of representation to the Assam and central legislatures. After the First Five Year Plan for NEFA, however, the NEFA people were expected to secure representation to the Assam Assembly. The pledge was not redeemed. Instead, the Ering committee and the Administrative Reforms Commission study team recommended the shifting of the NEFA headquarters from Shillong to somewhere in NEFA, the paving the way for a complete administrative separation of NEFA from the rest of Assam. Of course, the proposal was strongly supported by the logic of administrative convenience.

Panchayati raj only accelerated the process of the separation of NEFA. The Agency Council was very much like the Interim Body of Nagaland and in July 1971, the Government of India finally came out with a proposal for the constitution of NEFA into a Union Territory. It may be noted here that the Sixth Schedule

to the Constitution was the result of an integrationist passion that possessed the Constituent Assembly and the Congress party immediately after the partition of the country, and did not emerge from an objective assessment of the realities. As a nemesis of history, therefore, the whole structure of the Sixth Schedule was crumbling after twenty years of independence. But whereas in the other hills, the psychological separation started before the administrative separation, in NEFA the process was the reverse.

The Chrysalis of NEFA

'Progress' everywhere breeds new tensions. NEFA was no exception. With the spread of administration and development the area was becoming monetised. The number of outsiders increased in the administrative centres. Moneylending, prostitution and land alienation were some of the evils cropping up in the NEFA society. Not all the administrative officials are devoted social workers. The 'interpreters', who were the local agents of the administration, developed vested interests. There was a spurt in polygyny, which was paradoxically being aided by the administration's attempts at abolishing slavery.[15] Eligible girls preferred government employees, including Assam Rifles men, to the local youths. Venereal disease and leprosy were prevalent, but predated the administration in the region. They were generally ascribed to ecological conditions.

Liberation of the slaves created two main problems: (1) resettlement of the liberated, who had been alienated from their own society for generations and could not easily get land from their own communities; and (2) compensation to the masters whose agriculture depended mainly on slave labour. The administration, therefore, has decided to proceed slowly.[16]

The settlement of outsiders either through the acquiescence of the local people or by administrative action, acquisition of land for administrative purposes and felling of trees, often created problems for the administration. The administration decided to occupy uncultivated and unclaimed lands without compensation. But the cultivated communal and individual jhum lands are taken over only against compensation.[17] Acquisition

of forests occasionally leads to encroachment on jhum land, for which compensation is payable to village communities, after consultation with the tribal councils.[18] In places where tribal councils do not exist, the chiefs and headmen often usurp the benefits of such transactions, though compensations are really meant for village development.

According to Verrier Elwin, the justification for continued separation after Independence, especially the retention of the Inner Line, lay in the need for protecting the indigenous culture and genius of the tribes. This argument has been criticised as the 'museum specimen approach'.[19] The celebrated geopolitician, K.M. Panikkar, has gone to the extent of suggesting settlement on the Himalayan range, including NEFA.[20] The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) had suggested a relaxation of the Inner Line restrictions. A scheme for the resettlement of ex-servicemen in NEFA was actually incorporated in the Fourth Five Year Plan after an earlier scheme to resettle some Chakma refugees from the Lushai hills had practically fizzled out.

As in all other hills, in the frontier areas too, traditional agriculture is predominantly jhum, though the Apatanis have for long been practising permanent cultivation. The only industries that exist there are weaving and cane and bamboo craft. Some of the people have been good traders, but like other hill people (except possibly the Khasi), they are not investors. The NCAER has therefore suggested large-scale government investment to convert jhum lands into terraced fields. NEFA possesses some valuable mineral resources including oil. All these developments, however, would be feasible only after extensive growth of communications, which the government is sincerely trying to achieve for the purpose of integrated administration. For the first time, the government has undertaken the building of a lateral road connecting all the district headquarters.

A potent source of tension in NEFA was religion. When the Government of India decided to extend administration beyond the Inner Line, the early recruits to the service were mostly army officials and educated people from the advanced hill districts. Most of these recruits were zealous Christians, which made the government clamp down on semi-missionary activities. Local chiefs, as elsewhere, were at first opposed to missionary activities. But the resources of the missions operating from the

Brahmaputra valley largely neutralised the administrative policies aimed at a 'cultural revival' and towards stalling proselytisation. In 1967, when the government issued a quit order on some of the foreign missionaries (then totalling 299) in Assam, a virtual cold war started between the missions and the government. The reaction in official circles produced a cultural parallelism with Hinduism. There is now a conscious effort among some officials to bring the indigenous religious faiths into a close proximity to Hinduism. An interesting example is furnished by a Bharat *darshan* (tour of India) in early 1968 which brought some Adis in contact with a Hindu monk of southern India who gave them images of their supreme gods Doni Polo (the sun and the moon). The temple for the gods, who in the Adi's pristine religion were not represented by images, was built with much fanfare in a more or less Hindu way. An absurd comparison has been drawn between the excavated site of a seventh century AD (?) civilisation at Bhismaknagar and the legends of Lord Krishna and Rukmini. Buddhism is, of course, a well established religion in Kameng and Lohit, and is encouraged. Islam is absent. No proselytising mission, Christian or Hindu, is allowed though Christian officials and army personel, some Adis and Daflas, have their private churches. The Ramakrishna Mission has a school at Along and will have control over another in Tirap, but it is not allowed to preach.[21]

There were two adverse reactions to this policy. First, the Christian missions in the other hills and in the Assam valley felt strongly about it, and the lay Christians of these areas as well as the Christian officials of NEFA shared their sentiment. Secondly, Christianity being somehow identified with modernism in the minds of the hill people, the students from NEFA, who came down to the plains and to Shillong, frequently chose to be converted. Possibly to check the trend, the administration stopped sanctioning stipends to boys who wanted to go to the missionary colleges for higher education. On the other hand, Christianity got the patronage of the European tea gardens at the foothills.

The articulation of these tensions, apart from the panchayati raj, could have led to new conflicts. Verrier Elwin had warned against the statutory panchayats sweeping away the traditional tribal councils.[22] The fear was based on the anticipation of

reaction to the substitution of the 'personal' authority of the village chiefs by regulations and the system of election. The Panchayati Raj Regulation hardly changed the structure of the village authorities, but the North East Frontier (Administration) Supplementary Regulation of 1971 introduced the electoral system in the village panchayats, throwing up opportunities for leadership to a vocal young generation. In the Pradesh Council, elected after the constitution of Arunachal Pradesh, there was only one member belonging to a clan of chiefs and one member belonging to a clan traditionally identified as a clan of slaves. There was a general dominance of youth and education. In a few villages of Tirap, on the other hand, elections to panchayats were resisted by the chiefs.

In many ways, the old NEFA was in the stage of a chrysalis. All its parts were certainly not primitive. Education was spreading in the foothills and in the administrative centres, the local officials and the students being the privileged class, signifying a new kind of 'black-coatism'. In the most advanced parts of NEFA, a few millionaires could be found. The advancement of the Adi was an object of envy for the others. The resultant tensions were often aggravated by the mistakes and lapses of the administrative personnel.

But the basic problem that the administration faced there was in a way similar to what the British faced in the other hills, namely rootlessness. The Assamese, who had a historical link with the NEFA people, were fast diminishing in the administrative cadre which was now being filled up almost entirely from north India. The administration was yet to develop a solid corps of officials from among the local people. Though educational opportunities were spreading, they could be well utilised only by the advanced sections like the Adi. On the other hand, education alienated the youth from their social milieu and turning them into sycophants of the administration. 'Unfortunately, the idea of serving their backward kinsmen has seldom caught the imagination of the educated young men,' lamented an observer.[23] The administration, uncertain of itself, wavered between the exuberant youth and the established traditional leadership while projecting an impression of benevolent paternalism.

Language and Politics

The predicament of the administration is nowhere clearer than in the education policy. In May 1970 and in January 1971 the predominantly Adi students of Pasighat College (the only college in Arunachal) held demonstrations demanding the replacement of Assamese as the medium of instruction in schools, and intensive teaching of Hindi and English. English and Hindi are passports to jobs in the administration which, so far as the indigenous personnel is concerned, is almost a monopoly of the Adi.[24] On the other hand, the Wanchos of Tirap held demonstrations in favour of Assamese which was the *lingua franca* of NEFA. People of the Brahmaputra valley held the NEFA administration responsible for this cultural alienation.[25]

The genuine problem of the NEFA students was that they could not help learning Assamese and bearing the burden of four languages. The burden could have been reduced if the NEFA dialects were given the Assamese script for, except Monpa, all major NEFA dialects draw heavily upon Assamese. The administration, however, put the NEFA dialects in Devnagari script[26] and in the early days, a vigorous programme was taken up for textbook production in local languages. The enthusiasm disappeared in no time. Hindi was introduced as the medium of instruction from upper primary onwards but was soon replaced by Assamese, without official admission. In 1971 the administration decided to affiliate all schools of NEFA to the Central Schools system, with English as the medium of instruction from upper primary onwards. The episode provides a glaring example of bureaucratic bungling.

At the second meeting of the Agency Council it was recommended that while pre-primary education should be imparted through the local languages, primary education should be through the medium of Assamese, and secondary education through English. At the fourth meeting, however, the Agency Council was told, according to an official report, that 'the Government of India had accepted the recommendation made by the Council in this regard during its second session. The schools in NEFA would thus be affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, Delhi, and the teaching pattern will

be the same as in Central Schools. This will mean that English will be the medium of instruction from Class I to Class XI in the schools of NEFA.'[27] It is common knowledge that the Central Schools system was planned as a substitute for the Cambridge schools, and this proposal to give the NEFA children the best Indian education would have been welcome if the record of vernacular education had been at least on par with that of the all-India average.

The only justification for the new education policy lay in its political orientation. If NEFA was to be politically separated from Assam, a cultural barrier was equally necessary to complete the process. The idea of a constitutional separation was mooted some time after the Chinese aggression of 1962, though the Government of Assam had made no contribution to the debacle. In the late 1960s, NEFA officials were openly talking of the constitution of NEFA as a Union Territory, though the commitment of the Constitution of India was clearly to a gradual integration of NEFA with Assam. The panchayati raj being an administrative arrangement, it did not materially alter the situation, but separation was clearly in the perspective. Parliament, the only legitimate authority to alter the commitment of the Constitution, had the first opportunity to formalise the *fait accompli* when the comprehensive scheme for the reorganisation of the northeast region came up. Till then NEFA was regarded purely as a defence problem and, therefore, the exclusive concern of the bureaucracy.

To complete the story of NEFA's transformation, in early 1971 the NEFA Agency Council recommended the name of Arunachal Pradesh for NEFA. At the fourth meeting of the council, according to an official report, 'members were informed that the new political set-up for the area in the shape of a Union Territory was in the offing and Government of India was considering the proposal of giving the status of a Union Territory to the North East Frontier Agency.' The report went on:

> In the light of this proposal the members had a brief discussion. The consensus of opinion was that the matter being of great importance having political implications the proposal should be discussed threadbare by the Panchayat institutions at different levels, namely, the Zilla Parishads, Anchal Samitis and Gram

Panchayats. Besides, educated youths of NEFA as well as the NEFA tribal officers are to be consulted. It was accordingly decided that the proposals should be discussed in detail at the earliest opportunity and a decision as to the pattern of administration most suitable to NEFA would be taken. This decision will be communicated in due course to the Government of India. To facilitate a fruitful discussion on the proposal the Agency Council members were briefed about patterns of administration obtaining in Union Territories.[28]

This extensive quotation is given only to show how unprepared the Agency Council was for the news. One wonders why, when balkanisation of the rest of India was so much disfavoured by the responsible national leadership, NEFA should be granted an unsolicited separation. Statehood for NEFA was a euphemism for separation from Assam, for no constitutional progress of NEFA was foreseen immediately. The Pradesh Council created by the North East Frontier (Administration) Supplementary Regulation was really the Agency Council minus the Administrator who, however, presided over the council meetings and nominated three members to the council from unrepresented or under-represented tribes/communities. The Administrator was to nominate five members of the Pradesh Council as his counsellors whose advice will be recommendatory. The term of the executive counsellors, unless renewed, was one year. The idea seemed to be a probation for responsible government and no grant of constitutional rights. Certainly this did not call for separation of NEFA from Assam.

Even this limited measure of change was likely to produce tension at the village level. The composition of the gram panchayats was changed from the 'traditional village authority' to 'a body of persons elected according to the tribal customary methods by the permanent residents of such village or group of villages as the Deputy Commissioner may specify in this behalf as prescribed' (according to Schedule II of the Act). It may be mentioned in this connection that in neighbouring Nagaland, a legislation was introduced substituting the district level 'tribal councils' by 'regional councils' in 1970. Resistance to the enactment was so great that it could not be enforced. There was no reason to hope that NEFA would not have similar repercussions. When on 6 October 1972 the Congress founded its

unit in Arunachal, the two nominated MPs who joined it were frowned upon by the administration.

Notes and References

1 Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA, second edition, Shillong, 1964, p. 6.
2 Mackenzie, History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal, Calcutta, 1884, p. 55.
3 Lakhimpur is the easternmost plains district of Assam, Darrang is on its west and on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.
4 Government of Assam, Notification No. TAD/R/35/50/100, dated 23 February 1951.
5 The step was considered necessary following the report of tax collection by Tibet at Towang.
6 G.O.I. Notification No. GA/140/50/121, dated 19 January 1954; Regulation No. 1 of 1954.
7 Administrative Reforms Committee, Report of the Study Team on the Union Territories and NEFA, pp. 415–16.
8 The National Council of Applied Economic Research, Techno-Economic Survey of NEFA, Delhi, 1966, pp. 151–52.
9 Elwin, op. cit., p. 4.
10 Report of the Commission on Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes, 1960–61, Delhi, p. 281.
11 ARC study team's Report, paragraphs 135 and 683.
12 Ibid., paragraph 159.
13 The North East Frontier Agency, Draft Fourth Five Year Plan, cyclostyled, Shillong, August 1968.
14 Paragraph 18 of the Sixth Schedule made it clear that the 'agency function of the Governor is transitional until the District Council is constituted in the NEFA'. The panchayati raj falls short of the district autonomy anticipated in the Sixth Schedule.
15 Sociology of North-Eastern Hills–Proceedings of the Third Summer School, Kohima, April 7–14, 1970, Department of Sociology and Centre of Advanced Studies, University of Delhi, Delhi, 1970: A Statement on the Sociology of NEFA, p. 3. Wives for labour were procured with the compensation money.
16 Administrative directives on the abolition of slavery in NEFA are found in Important Directives on Administration of NEFA, Shillong, 1967, pp. 181–89.
17 Ibid., pp. 10–13.

18 Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts Regulation, clauses 10 and 15; ibid., pp. 18–23.

19 Journalist Harish Chandola wrote:

> 'Why is the Inner Line there today? It is to prevent me and a professor from next door Gauhati from going into NEFA. I am afraid it is there to prevent thinking people from going in. Otherwise, I have known most objectionable characters taken in by some officers who consider themselves owners of this frontier.
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> 'I had heard Dr Elwin say that the Inner Line prevents Marwaris from going in and exploiting the tribal people. But I have known Biharis and Punjabis who have been given permits to do similar exploitations' – 'Troubled Frontier' in Pannalal Dasgupta's, *A Common Perspective for North-East India*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 159.

20 K.M. Panikkar, Geographical Factors in Indian History, second edition, Bombay, 1959, p. 69.

21 When Tuensang was a part B tribal area, Christian proselytising was freely allowed.

22 Report of the Committee on Special Multi-Purpose Tribal Blocks, Delhi, 1960, pp. 169–72.

23 Rabi Choudhury, 'Changing Pattern of NEFA Leadership', Mainstream, 30 May 1970. See also N.C. Rajkhowa's article in The Assam Tribune, 8 December 1970.

24 In a letter to the editor, The Assam Tribune, 17 July 1970, T.L. Rajkumar, general secretary of the All Tirap Students' Union, observed, 'The slow progress in the field of education is due to lack of proficiency of the children in the English language.' Enthusiasts of English, however, ignore its limitations as a medium of instruction in the national field.

25 Chanakya, a columnist of The Assam Tribune, wrote on June 1970, that 'the process of alienation between the peoples of NEFA and Assam has been consciously fostered by some pigheaded bureaucrats in the Administration'.

26 In 1948 the Indian cabinet adopted the policy of imparting the Devnagari script to all tribal dialects. The policy suited the central Indian tribes. The eastern hill people preferred the roman script. NEFA had no opportunity to express its choice, though the vocal sections prefer the roman or Assamese scripts.

27 Proceedings of the meeting in NEFA Information, August 1971, Shillong. Pre-primary education in NEFA, it should be pointed out, is imparted through local languages.

28 Ibid.

CHAPTER 12

Tripura and Manipur

Under the Constitution of India the two former native states, Tripura and Manipur, became Part C states to be administered by the central government through chief commissioners or Lieutenant Governors.[1] The Legislative Assembly of Manipur, founded by the Maharaja was dissolved, and the Part C States (Laws) Act of 1950[2] made new provisions for legislatures and councils of ministers in such states. Manipur and Tripura got their legislatures and nominated councils of advisers, compliance with whose counsel/ advice was not obligatory for the chief commissioners.[3]

During the visit of the States Reorganisation Commission, the demand for statehood grew. The SRC was of the opinion that Manipur and Tripura could not be viable states, and anticipated the merger of Tripura in the short run, and of Manipur in the long run, with Assam. For the general pattern, the SRC suggested the conversion of the Part C states into Union Territories with reduced autonomy. They would be represented in the Union legislature, but there would be no division of responsibility in respect of them. 'Democracy in these areas should take the form of the people being associated with the administration in an advisory rather than a directive capacity.'[4] The Commission suggested that provisions might be made on the lines of Sections 94 to 96 of the Government of India Act of 1935, for the President to exercise regulation making power in respect of some of the 'territories', enabling the central executive 'to deal with these areas in an appropriate manner.' The government accepted the recommendations, but decided that Tripura and Manipur would remain Union Territories.

A Responsible Government

The States Reorganisation Act brought into being the new territorial pattern under which the whole country was split into states and Union Territories. The Part C States (Laws) Act was modified as the Union Territories (Laws) Act of 1956.[5] The Seventh Amendment of the Constitution in the same year altered Article 239, under which the Territorial Councils Act of 1956[6] was passed, granting some autonomy in local affairs to Tripura and Manipur. Territorial Councils were created therein with powers over education, public health, roads, transport, revenue works, animal husbandry, relief works, etc. The councils also had powers to levy taxes (subject to central approval) on professions, trades, callings and employment, tolls of bridges and school fees. The Administrator of the territory could attend meetings of the council on which he could exercise substantial control. But as parliament was the real legislative body for the territories, they were given weightage in their representation to parliament. An advisory committee for each territory, including members of parliament from it, was associated with the Home Minister for administrative purposes.

'Evidently, the above arrangements were not considered adequate by the people of some of the Territories,' wrote the Administrative Reforms Commission's (ARC) study team.[7] Demands for responsible government were almost unanimously expressed. A *satyagraha* movement in Manipur (April 1960) resulted in deaths and suffering. The government appointed a committee in 1961 under the chairmanship of the then Law Minister, Ashoke Sen, which submitted its report in June 1962, recommending the transfer of more subjects by Parliament to the Territorial Councils.[8] But the government realised that this would not go far in meeting the territories' demands. It therefore decided to reverse the trend set by the SRC, and revise the model of the Part C States Act of 1951, whereupon the Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act of 1962 added Article 239A to the Constitution enabling parliament to create in some of the territories, including Manipur and Tripura:

(a) a body, whether elected or partly nominated and partly elected, to function as a Legislature for the Union Territories or

b) a Council of Ministers, or both, with such constitution, powers and functions in each case, as may be specified in the law.

Following the amendment, the Union Territories Act of 1963 created legislatures and ministries in Manipur and Tripura, abolishing their Territorial Councils.[9] Part II of the Act provided for a Legislative Assembly for each territory with a maximum strength of 32 (30 elected, 2 nominated) and reservation of seats for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The legislative practices and procedures of the Assemblies were similar to those of the State Legislative Assemblies but all Bills passed by the Territorial Assemblies had to be reserved by the administration for the President's assent, though the Administrator could himself recommend the demand for grants. The Legislative Assembly could make laws for the whole or any part of the territory on subjects included in the Union list and the concurrent list without derogating from the power of parliament on them.[10] Every legislation of the Assembly required the President's assent,[11] which might possibly be dispensed with, except in relation to the hill areas' interests. There were also separate consolidated and contingency funds for five Union Territories (Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Goa and Pondicherry).[12] The President could suspend the provisions of the Act in the case of a constitutional breakdown.

Part IV of the Act provided for a council of ministers 'to aid and advise' the Administrator except when he was required to act in his discretion, the field of which included his 'special responsibility' in respect of border security. So far the provision about the council of ministers was similar to that in the states. But the differences between the two lay in the discretionary power of the Administrator in the 'Judicial or Quasi-Judicial functions'.[13] Over and above this, in case of a difference of opinion between the Administrator and his ministers *on any matter*, the Administrator had to refer it to the President for decision.[14] Thus, even outside the normal discretionary field of the Administrator, ministerial advice was not obligatory in the Union Territories as it was in the states. Here was the main ground for complaint. In a more sensitive area like Nagaland,

the Governor had discretion only with regard to his 'special responsibility' about law and order.

The ARC study team suggested amendments for three key Sections of the Union Territories Act, namely Sections 25, 27 and 46. The team considered the provision for reservation of all Bills passed by the Union territorial legislatures (according to Section 25) unnecessary. Instead the Centre could issue an instrument of instructions, as under the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935, to the Administrators indicating the Centre's areas of interest in respect of which Bills might be reserved.[15] The Administrator might also be given ordinance making powers to the same extent.[16] The rules of business regarding the Union Territories might also be amended to dispense with prior consultation with the central government on all legislations.[17] The total central control over the finance of the territories could also be dispensed with.[18]

Panchayati raj was introduced in the plains areas of Manipur and Tripura in the early 1960s. During the Second Five Year Plan, tribal development blocks were founded on a selective basis. Their organisational structure differed little from that of the community development blocks. The National Extension Service now covers all the hill regions of the states. Till the achievement of statehood, Manipur and Tripura had their services almost totally staffed by the Indian Administrative Service[19] personnel, causing resentment among the local people.[20]

State Politics

The struggle for responsible government, which was the cause for the movements for statehood in Manipur and Tripura, had started almost simultaneously with the states' people's movement in the British period. In the 1930s, the Manipur Maharaja patronised the Nikhil Manipur Hindu Mahasabha consisting of Manipur's Hindu aristocrats. In 1938 a progressive Meithei, Irabot Singh, converted it into the Manipur Mahasobha. Soon it was affiliated to the States' People's Congress. After Independence it became the Manipur Congress.[21] Meanwhile, after a period of imprisonment, Irabot Singh formed the Praja Samiti and came into the fold of the Communist party. In 1948

there began a leftist movement following which the Communist party was suppressed. In 1952, a Naga with a Socialist Party ticket won the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat (a predominantly hill area). In 1957 the seat was won by a Congress Naga. In 1962 the Socialist Naga regained the seat but the Congress won him over. The former MP joined the Naga underground. As the 1967 ticket was awarded to the former Socialist, the Manipur Naga Council called for a boycott of the election by the Naga, and a Kuki independent (belonging to the Kuki National Assembly) won the seat. In 1971 he won the same seat as a member of the Congress, defeating his 1967 rival, now a candidate of the Manipur Naga Integration Council. The involvement of the all-India parties in the hill politics of Manipur is due to the absence of broadbased hill parties, which permits flexibility on the part of career minded hill leaders. The Inner Manipur seat was won in 1967 by the Communist Party of India (CPI). In 1971, the Congress won it again.

The Congress was established among the plains people of Tripura in the 1930s. The hill people of Tripura, as elsewhere, have not been consistent in patronising any all-India party. After the collapse of the Sengkrak, some of them came close to the Communist party for a while. But the tremendous influx of refugees caused immense suffering to them, as the CPI wavered and lost their support. After the split in the party, most of its refugee support went to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M). At the same time, Tripura is possibly one area where the Congress could retain its grip on a considerable number of refugees who obtained land, very often through questionable means with the connivance of the government. In 1967 the Congress offered one of the two Tripura seats to the local prince and, with his blessings, won both the Lok Sabha seats. After the split in the Congress party, the prince joined the Tripura Congress and both the seats in the 1971 Lok Sabha elections went to the CPI(M). Its victory was also aided by ministerial feuds and the complicated caste conflict within the Congress.

In the 30-member Tripura Assembly, the Communists won 15 seats in 1957, 12 in 1962 and only 3 in 1967. The Communist failure in 1967 probably encouraged adventurism. The example of the neighbouring Mizo underground also went home to the hill people. In November 1967 wall posters in the name of the

Sengkrak, directing the refugees to quit Tripura immediately, appeared in the Kanchannagar area.[22] In 1968 violence erupted. Yet, in spite of its all-India split the Congress remained in control of the Tripura government. In Manipur also it was in power since 1957, surviving defections through counter-defections. Factional fights in the party aggravated by the all-India split finally brought it down and caused the imposition of President's rule. Out of power, both factions of the Congress plunged into the statehood movement launched by the opposition parties.

One good point about the statehood movements in Tripura and Manipur is that, due to the support of the all-India parties who had developed some stake in the areas, the movement never became violent in Tripura. In 1959–60, the government tightened control in Manipur. In 1970 a Meithei Association indulged in some violence in Manipur. But because of the intervention of the all-India parties, the movement remained a non-violent struggle. It was suspended on 28 August 1970 and on 3 September the government accepted in principle the statehood demands of both.

Hills Politics in Manipur

Hill politics in Manipur took approximately the same course as in Assam. The consolidations were frequently on ethnic lines but involved major social issues dividing the hills vertically as well as horizontally. A Manipuri Naga intellectual explained such consolidations as 'partly due to the spread of Christianity and consequent introduction of western education and partly due to the encouragement given by the Government including the Maharaja himself.'[23]

Thus, a loose confederacy of Kuki chiefs organised the Kuki rebellion of 1917–18. One of the measures that the British authorities in Manipur adopted after this was the constitution in 1919 of a separate Naga-dominated subdivision with headquarters at Ukhrul. Soon the Tangkhul Long (Tangkhul Assembly) was founded there. The association increased its membership in 1925, and in 1961 it called itself the Tangkhul Naga Long. After the suppression of the anti-Kuki prophet movement of Jadonang in 1934, the Kabui Samiti of Ruongmei

was formed. It turned into the Kabui Naga Association in 1946. Christian Ruongmeis, on the other hand, formed a broader association in 1947 with the Christian Kachcha Nagas of north Cachar and Naga hills (Zemei and Liangmei respectively), called Zeliangruong. Other organisations like the Vaipei National Organisation (1944) and the Hmar Association (1945) also came into being on the eve of Independence.

In 1947 the Mizo Union, the anti-chief party demanding Mizo integration, was fast spreading its influence in the south Manipur hills. The Thaduo chiefs, erstwhile rulers of these hills (as the Sailos had been in the Lushai hills), therefore formed the Kuki National Association (KNA) in July 1947. The 1948 elections to the Manipur Assembly (under constitutional monarchy) were boycotted by the Mizo Union as well by the Naga National Council (NNC). A Tribal Union of the other small parties (without any ostensible connection with MacDonald Khar-Kongor) cropped up to take part in the elections. With the end of constitutional monarchy the Tribal Union disappeared, virtually leaving the Manipur hills to the Kuki National Assembly and the Naga National Council. Because of the limitations of ethnocentric politics, the KNA and the NNC remained at daggers drawn.

But the chief-centred Kuki society is much more riven than the Naga and the less privileged among them, especially those under the Thaduo chiefs. They started organising themselves in sundry groups like the Hmar Congress (1954), the Paite National Council (1956), the Gangte Tribal Union (1958), the Hmar National Union (1959) and the Baite National Union (1962). In 1959–60, there was a series of skirmishes between the Hmar and the Kuki. The Paite, on the other hand, tried to build up Chin solidarity. In the 1960s three distinct groups emerged in the non-Naga hill politics of Manipur – the Kuki, the Chin and the Hmar. The Hmar want the consolidation of the Hmar areas of Manipur and the Mizo and north Cachar hills. Chiefship among the Chin is somewhat weaker than among the Kuki. Much of their politics will probably depend upon the strategy of the Congress party which is the biggest in Manipur and which has absorbed a substantial following from the Chin National Front in the Mizo Hills.[24] The chiefs still play a major role in Kuki politics.

The Chiefs' Offensive in Manipur

The rules for the management of the state of Manipur issued in the British period were replaced by the Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation of 1947, which said that the 'responsibility for the administration of the hill peoples is vested in the Maharaja in Council and shall be exercised in accordance with the Constitution Act of the State and the provisions of this Regulation from time to time.'

In January 1950 the Union government had passed the Manipur State Courts (Amendment) Order of 1950, reorganising the civil judicial structure for the hills. Hitherto its chief court consisted of a judge and two assessors from among the hill people, nominated for each particular case by the Executive Council. The court was now renamed the judicial commissioner's court and the assessors were to be nominated by the chief commissioner. As the Executive Council was replaced by the council of advisers, the change did not substantially alter the situation. Another Order (No. 18 dated 18 January 1950) abolished the hill circles and constituted new subdivisions and vested civil powers as regards the hill areas in the subdivisional officers. Finally in May 1915, by another order[25] the commissioner constituted himself as the chief court, and the deputy commissioners as the hill bench, placing the subdivisional officers in a doubtful position, until the Manipur Courts Act and the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hills Areas) Act (Act 80) of 1956 virtually axed the Regulation. The Indian Penal Code as well as the Criminal Procedure Code were enforced in parts.[26]

All these changes affected the traditional structure of power in the villages. Thus, in the non-Christian villages the priest was an *ex officio* member of the traditional village authority. The 1956 Act only provided that where there was a chief or Khulakpa, he would be the president of the village council. But the priest would have no place unless he was elected. The chiefs' control over the village councils was also reduced. The resistance to the reorganisation was so great that the 1958 and 1961 elections to the councils were nominal in some cases and were not held at all in some others. A total of '624 villages were notified in 1961 for constitution of Hill Village Authorities but these institutions have become defunct now,' wrote the ARC study team in 1968.[27]

During July–August 1971, another nominal election was held for the constitution of hill village authorities.

On 22 October 1957, a Manipuri Naga Convention was held at Ukhrul, to voice the demand for the unification of all Nagas and to form the Manipur Naga Council(MNC).[28] On 22 November 1957 the president of the council, Angal Anal, issued a printed statement to declare the MNC's strict adherence to non-violence and to stress the need for an understanding with Phizo. It was only at the second convention on 30 November 1958, however, that the MNC could affiliate with the Zeliangruong, the Anal Union, the Mao–Maram Union and the Tangkhul Long. The occasion was provided by the introduction of the Manipur (Village Authorities in the Hill Areas) Act of 1956. The convention demanded the repeal of the Act and a return to the old village authorities.[29]

The Union Territories Act of 1963 made special provisions for the hill areas of Manipur,[30] constituting a standing committee of all the members of the Assembly representing the hill areas. It got jurisdiction over matters relating to the management of land and forest, use of canal waters for irrigation, shifting cultivation, village and town committees, appointment or succession of chiefs and headmen, inheritance of property, marriage and social customs. Every Bill relating to the hill areas that was moved in the Legislative Assembly was subjected to the scrutiny and approval of the committee, the proper functioning of which became the special responsibility of the Administrator.

The origin of the Kuki–Naga hostility is a matter for speculation. It is, however, a historial fact that Kukis were armed and settled on the borders of the Naga hills since 1853 to counteract Naga turbulence. With the growth of hostile Naga movements in Manipur, armed clashes between the Naga and the Kuki increased. In the early 1960s a Kuki Volunteer Force was formed and was armed by the government. In 1965 at the all-party conference in Churachandpur, Lal Denga established contact with the restless young elements. Several Kuki groups had meanwhile fled from the harassment of the Naga underground to the Kubaw valley of Burma. Lal Denga's appeal for a sovereign Mizoram, with the Mizo (including the Kuki) of India, Burma and Pakistan, inspired the disgruntled Kuki youth. Yet, it was not until the passage of the Manipur Hill

Areas (Acquisition of Chiefs' Rights) Act of 1967 in June 1967 that violence in the south Manipur hills broke out in league with the MNF and even the Naga underground. In that month about three hundred Kuki chiefs assembled in Imphal to express their determination to fight the Act.[31]

Tripura Hills

Independent Tripura, on the other hand, never had a 'tribal' policy. The 'tribal' king in fact settled many non-tribals in his plains territories. The Tripuri and their kin shunned plough cultivation,[32] and to check encroachment by them on forests, the Maharaja introduced 'forest reservation' in 1887 through an Act relating to reserved forests.[33] In 1961 the National Council of Applied Economic Research reported that 'one-third of its people, the original inhabitants, live on the hills by primitive methods in a subsistence economy, based on shifting cultivation, which is steadily destroying the remaining forests. The other two-thirds, of whom more than half are refugees, practise settled agriculture in their 'plains'.'[34] Today the refugees form the majority, their total population having almost trebled since 1947.

The Government of India in the first few years after the merger followed, in addition to the 'forest policy', a 'soil conservation' policy, as shifting cultivation caused erosion. In 1955, L.M. Shrikant, the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, suggested that on account of the great national importance of forests, conservation of soil and economic development of the tribal people, it was necessary to help the hill people practising shifting cultivation to switch over to permanent cultivation.[35]

In 1953 a pilot programme for the settlement of the *jhumias* (shifting cultivators) was undertaken in the Belonia Subdivision. At the end of 1955, the scheme was made extensive. Jhumia settlement colonies were established with land, money grants and various facilities for cottage industry and education. Alternatively about four acres of land were to be allocated to each family. Cash subsidies would enable them to change over to permanent cultivation. A regulated jhuming right within the reserved forests was also granted, called the *taungya* system. But though some jhumias took to settled cultivation, there is a

persistent aversion towards it. In 1964 J.B. Ganguly calculated that out of 5106 families that received grants for the purpose, 302 had left the settlement for jhuming. Many have leased out the lands for sharecropping by plains people.[36] The study team of the ARC observed:

> In the course of their discussion with us, several non- officials, including legislators, brought to our notice the sad plight of the tribals. They alleged that the tribals were being deprived of their land through unfair means. This was in spite of a legal ban on transfer of land by tribals to non-tribals. It was also alleged that the refugees were encroaching on Government land which would have ultimately gone to the tribals. We were informed that this problem has assumed a political complexion and may lead to an agitation.[37]

The problem of Tripura, as of Manipur, is bifurcated. The hill people of Tripura kept away from the statehood movement. But whereas among the hill people of Manipur the demand is of a definitely political nature, the hill people of Tripura are, at the moment, fighting for the most fundamental economic cause, namely, their land and survival. The government's failure to solve it may only help their politicisation in a dangerous way.

Notes and References

1 The Constitution of India, Delhi, 1950, part IX, Articles 239–42.
2 Act 30 of 1950.
3 Section 42 of the Act.
4 *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission*, Delhi, 1955.
5 Adaptation order no. 2, 1956, vide *The Manipur Code*, Imphal, 1963, vol. i, pp. 79–82.
6 Act 103 of 1956.
7 Administrative Reforms Committee, *Report of the Study Team on the Union Territories and NEFA*, Delhi, 1968, paragraph 2.
8 Ibid., paragraphs 43–44.
9 Vide the *Manipur Code*, vol. 1, pp. 225–56.
10 *The Union Territories Act*, Section 18.
11 Ibid., Section 25.
12 Ibid., Sections 27 and 28.
13 Ibid., Section 44(5).

14 Ibid., Section 41(1), proviso.
15 ARC study team, *Report*. paragraphs 230–3.
16 Ibid., paragraph 235.
17 Ibid., paragraph 233.
18 Ibid., paragraph 238.
19 Ibid., paragraph 165.
20 In a letter to Prime Minister Nehru, dated Imphal,1 May 1960, L. Achaw Singh, the Socialist MP from Manipur, repudiated the central administration's claims about economic assistance and development and accused it of 'huge waste in expenditure'. Referring to the over 200 non-Manipuri officials who controlled all key positions, he wrote, 'The only justification for the denial of responsible government in Manipur seems to be the desirability of continued employment of these officers.'
21 V. Venkata Rao, 'Instability in Manipur Politics', *The Assam Tribune*, 4 October 1967.
22 V.I.K. Sarin, 'Tripura', *The Assam Tribune*, 7 July 1968.
23 Gangnumei Kabui, 'Political Developments in the Hill Areas of Manipur', paper presented to the Third Summer School on the Sociology of the North-Eastern Hill Areas of India, Kohima, April 1970.
24 In his letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, L. Achaw Singh (op.cit.) reprimanded the Home Minister of the Union government for his statement that the Manipur Naga Council had not associated itself with Manipur's statehood movement. 'I am of the opinion that the Home Minister has handled a dangerous weapon to beat down the *satyagraha movement*,' he said.
25 Government of Manipur, Notification No. J/18/51/23, dated 5 May 1951.
26 *The Manipur Code*, vol. 1, pp. 87–125.
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28 *Proceedings of the Convention*.
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30 Section 52 of the Union Territories Act of 1963.
31 See *The Assam Tribune*, 2 July 1967, report on Naga hostiles.
32 W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VI (Hill Tipperah), Calcutta, 18/6, p. 503.
33 Act II of 1887 A.D.
34 NCAER, *Techno-Economic Survey of Tripura*, Delhi, 1961, p. 4.
35 *Report of the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*, 1955, Delhi, part I, p. 123.
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37 ARC study team, *Report*, paragraph 691.

CHAPTER 13

Importance of Northeast India

'The geographical situation of Assam as a frontier State of India has given to the province its special position and importance. The importance of the North-Western Frontier Province adjoining Afghanistan and the ever expanding Empire of Russia during British times has now been eclipsed in Republican India by the importance of the North-Eastern Frontier Areas,' observed Suniti Kumar Chatterjee in the early 1950s.[1] The importance has become greater now with the emergence of seven political units in the region, all with international borders. These borders have already been involved in at least three major wars (1962, 1965 and 1971) and numerous security hazards.

The delicate neck of plains that connects northeast India with the rest of the country is, between Nepal and Bangladesh, only about 12 miles wide, touching the two ends of a 2500-mile long international boundary and intersected by a number of turbulent rivers flowing from the Himalayas southward into Bangladesh. It took independent India nearly two years to build the Assam link rail line through the corridor, avoiding the territory once held by Pakistan. Direct navigation between the two parts of India is impossible but an aircraft may overfly the rail route. Before 1971 the air route through East Pakistan was frequently disturbed and water transport was discontinued after the 1965 India–Pakistan war. Water transport through Bangladesh resumed in November 1972. Air transport is easy now.

One of the considerations that prompted the States Reorganisation Commission to suggest administrative union of northeast India was that of defence. The British were aware of the problem. For them, however, the hill areas were also a counterpoise to the Indian plains, which were surging with nationalist fervour. In the early nineteenth century, British interest in upper Assam was mainly political and military in view of its strategic position, as amply stressed by Captain White, Political Officer at Sadiya in 1835. He regarded upper

Assam 'as a grand defile leading to this most invulnerable quarter,' any expenses in defending which might be viewed 'in the same light as the occupation of such posts as Gibraltar, Malta and the Cape of Good Hope.'[2] On 12 August 1878, S.C. Bayley, chief commissioner of Assam, made a survey of the defence situation of Assam and concluded 'that we have little to fear from any organised aggression of a foreign enemy, or from internal rebellion: but that, on the other hand, we have to guard at every point along an enormously extended external frontier, and along the quasi-frontier of the Naga hills, against raids from barbarous tribes who, of no organised strength, can yet issue from the hills, cut up villages and carry back their plunder with great ease . . .'[3] By the end of the century these 'barbarous tribes' were manageable. In 1886 when upper Burma was annexed, the problem of the eastern border was more or less solved, but the Himalayan question remained hanging in the balance.

China, Tibet and Burma

When the first frontier tract, the Dibrugarh Frontier Tract, was formed in 1882 the object was to control the 'wild' tribes there, living beyond the Inner Line. The British-controlled area was demarcated by an imaginary 'outer line' beyond which Tibet was in control. In the winter of 1885/86 Needham, the first Assistant Political Officer, made a trip to 'a point very close to' the southeastern Tibetan border town of Rima.[4] In the winter of 1907/8, Noel Williamson went along the same path to be 'acquainted with the people and their country and to collect information regarding the practicability of a trade-route towards south-eastern Tibet,'[5] following which the Lieutenant Governor of Assam recommended a greater control over the Abor and the Mishmi areas. But the Government of India disapproved of it.[6] Williamson's occasional exercises went on and in January–February 1911, he expressed concern at the growing Chinese influence in the area. The provincial government also feared that the Chinese would overawe the border people and 'dominate all the tea gardens north of Brahmaputra.'[7] On 30/31 March 1911, Williamson and Gregorson (a tea garden doctor accompanying him) were murdered by the Abors. This led to the

Abor expedition of 1911–12 and the subsequent consolidation of control.[8] Finally in 1914 the McMahon Line was drawn.

China ceased to be a threat to India's borders after Tibet went out of its grip during the 1911–12 revolt of Sun Yat-sen. The Montford report practically ignored the northeastern border as a security problem except for suggesting, for the purposes of a common defence, the continued union of India with Burma. A greater importance attached to the northeastern frontier in view of the historical Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia including Tibet,[9] and the subsequent Bolshevik revolution. In spite of its traditional links with Tibet, or perhaps because of it so far as its people's conservatism is concerned, NEFA has turned its face from Tibet after the Dalai Lama's escape in 1959. More than Tibet or China, Burma has been positively involved with the destiny of northeast India. The economic and cultural relations between the two countries can be traced back to the pre-Christian era. Assam provided this link between the Far East and India, with the only two land routes, one through upper Assam and Yunnan (the present Stilwel road) and the other through Cachar and Manipur. The ethnic composition of Assam also points to connections between the two lands since prehistoric times.

Burma's intervention in Assam brought the British to eastern India and, subsequently, to Burma. The whole of Burma was annexed to the British Raj by 1886, resulting in a tremendous change in the political geography of northeastern India. The entire Patkoi range, extending down to the eastern border of Manipur and connecting the Chin hills, already under British control, automatically fell to the British. No time was lost in consolidating the grip over the new possessions. Soon after, Alexander Mackenzie was appointed chief commissioner of Burma. Extension of administration from both sides resulted in the division of the 'spheres of influence' of the Governments of Assam and Burma. But both governments being under the same Governor-General, no precise demarcation was considered necessary. The second impact of the rather short period of association of Burma with British India was a steady flow of population from coastal India in the form of immigrant labourers and petty traders. Assam did not particularly benefit because of the difficult land route.

The hills that surround Burma occupy two-fifths of its territory and contain rich mineral and forest resources, but only one-seventh of its population is settled there. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, the British authorities started exploring the hills and upper Burma for commercial purposes.[10] On 13 October 1887, the chief commissioner of Assam recommended to the Government of India an expedition to 'examine the country between Nakum in the Dibrugarh district and the Hukong valley, with the objective of building a military road to Burma.' Needham unsuccessfully visited the Hukong valley in 1888[11] but in 1891 he reached upper Burma on a military mission.[12] Earlier D.R. Lyall, the commissioner of Chittagong Division (in Bengal), while forwarding the scheme of administration of the South Lushai Hills District, drew the government's attention to what, in his opinion, was 'the most important point' in connection with the administration of the hills.

> Mandalay is only some 250 miles as the crow flies from Chittagong, and Chittagong will be within 20 to 22 hours' journey from Calcutta when the railway is made. If, then, a feasible way for a cart road or a railway can be discovered from Chittagong to Mandalay, the land route to Upper Burma will enable the surplus population of Bengal, who refuse to cross the sea, to spread into Upper Burma, benefiting both provinces. The trade of Upper Burma will also gain much by the possibility of easy communication between Calcutta and Mandalay.[13]

Soon the Government of India appointed R.A. Way, an experienced engineer, to investigate the possibility of establishing the routes. He examined three routes: (1) The coastal route from Chittagong through Arrakan to the Chindwin river of Burma, (2) the Manipur route from Lamding through the Kubaw valley across the Chindwin, and (3) the Hukong valley route from Dibrugarh across the Patkoi range. In the winter of 1895/96, Way surveyed the third route. The distance appeared to be 284 miles. Another survey was done on it in the winter of 1917/18. F.W. Allum, the engineer-in-chief, reported on 30 April 1922 that the least costly line was, subject to some variations, the third.[14]

This trend towards India–Burma integration was directed along an altogether different line after 1923. Meanwhile,

in 1899 Burma was constituted into a province headed by a lieutenant governor. The Montagu–Chelmsford Declaration of 1917 encouraged the movement for home rule there. Burma got dyarchy two years after the other Governor's provinces got it, in 1923. Yet the General Council of Burmese Associations boycotted the new system up to the autumn of 1932, demanding complete home rule. The 'cooperationist' parties, on the other hand, worked for the political development of Burma on 'independent line' that is, apart from India. At the end of the last century, while India and Burma were moving towards administrative integration, it was decided at the Chin–Lushai conference that the hills should be divided. With the beginning of constitutional reforms, the hills were sought to be integrated for the purpose of exclusion. Hence N.E. Parry's proposal in 1928 for a province or division comprising the hills of Assam and Burma.

While recommending separation of Burma from India, the Simon Commission made it 'clear that whatever arrangements are made for defence against attacks on the Assam–Burma front must be coordinated between India and Burma.'[15] It was on this consideration that Reginald Coupland later suggested that before the grant of any kind of dominion status, Britain might make India and Burma agree to defence treaties with it[16] and that 'the administration of the hill tracts of Assam might possibly be associated with the system of frontier defence.'[17]

The White Paper of Ramsay MacDonald did not deal specifically with Burma. The Secretary of State for India, however, prepared a document, in consultation with the cooperationist Burmese delegates, anticipating separation of Burma from India in case of future reforms. The General Council opposed separation which they suspected would push Burma backward in the overall progress towards dominion status. The general election of 1932 saw the victory of the anti-separatists. Ultimately, Burma got both the reforms and separation in 1937. But the integration of about 88,000 square miles of backward tracts 'proved to be difficult'. During the Second World War, when Aung San's Freedom League was fighting the British army, the hill people offered ready cooperation to the British. In the Anglo-Burmese Treaty of 17 October 1947, a provision was incorporated in order to 'safeguard' the interests of the tribal populations. The constitution that was drafted had to grant the

Shan and the Karennese states the right to secede from Burma after ten years, leaving room for future trouble in Burma and immediately encouraging secessionism in the Mizo and Naga hills of India.

Surrounded by hills whose inhabitants were never effectively controlled by its government, and possessing undefined boundaries with the neighbouring states of India, China and Thailand, Burma naturally has an immense problem in maintaining good relations with its neighbours. Manipur, for instance, was a state quite powerful in the eighteenth century and had a long period of hostility with Burma over the ownership of the fertile Kubaw valley until 1834 when, through a treaty with the British government, the valley was transferred to Burma. As late as 11 April 1935, the British government in India told the Maharaja of Manipur that the question of ownership of the Kubaw valley could not be reopened 'at this late stage'.[18] It has already been noted that a clear demarcation of the Indo-Burma border south of Manipur could never be made because of British uncertainty about the administrative policy in the whole Kuki– Chin area. This 900-mile long border is being demarcated since 1969 in a friendly spirit.

The fact that after the separation of India from Burma the latter continued to pose a defence problem to British India was amply demonstrated during the Second World War. The existing India–Burma amity has to a great extent relieved India of this defence problem. The northern border of Burma, however, remains a common concern of the two states.

There are several Naga groups inhabiting the tri-junction between Burma, China and India which pay scant respect to the territorial jurisdictions of the two countries. There are the Kachin and the Shan who, during the heyday of the Han empire, were the subjects of China. After the defeat of Kuo Min-tang, many of their followers entered the Shan states. In spite of occasional military actions by the Burmese government against them, the infiltrators dodged evacuation and now maintain themselves by opium smuggling, currency rackets and blackmail in the hill villages. In 1954, U Nu visited China and agreed with Chou En-lai on negotiation about the border. The border agreement was, however, signed only in 1960 almost along the line claimed by China in 1956. The Chinese intruders on the Burmese side of

the border are still at large in the virtually unadministered area under the control of the Kachin autonomous region of Burma. The area naturally provides the Naga and the Mizo underground with the most convenient route to China.

Bangladesh

Surrounded on three sides by Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) Tripura's connection with the rest of India, through Cachar, is severely interrupted by five hill ranges stretching from north to south. In 25 years of independence, Tripura got 25 miles of rail line, far away from Agartala its capital. The communications position in Mizoram is worse, for the weak surface of the hills impedes road building. Sandwiched between Burma and the Chittagong hills, it is an ideal place for insurgency and illegal traffic.

Indo-Pakistan relations have never allowed India to be complacent about the northeast region. In the early fifties, free movement between the two countries stopped and after the 1965 war, trade between them also stopped. While India was keen on restoring normal economic links, a small-scale business in illegal traffic developed in the hilly border. After the Naga and Mizo troubles broke out, East Pakistan became a convenient gateway for the rebels' contact with China. The Chittagong Hill Tract provided sanctuary to the MNF.

In February 1971 the Government of India unilaterally opened some border markets of Meghalaya in order to alleviate the difficulties of the border people. When East Bengal was in revolt, Pakistan accused India of providing sanctuary to the Bengalis and pushed a quarter of a million refugees into the hill districts. The Governments of Assam and Meghalaya alleged infiltration by Pakistani agents among the refugees. Moinul Huq Chaudhuri was sent to Assam in order to mobilise Muslim opinion which had been apprehensive of the course of events. Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, a former Muslim leader of Goalpara who had crossed over to Pakistan and had set up the left-wing National Awami Party, passed through Assam. His plea for the cause of Bangladesh helped Huq Chaudhuri's mission. For a few years in the late 1960s, repatriation of

Muslim intruders in Assam was a serious political issue. From late March 1971 streams of Hindu and Muslim refugees flowed into the.state, many of whom were former repatriates. In spite of an abundance of sympathy for them, Assam and Meghalaya experienced some small-scale communal conflicts.

Besides the large number of Hindu and Muslim refugees from the then East Pakistan, many Khasis, Garos and Chakmas also took shelter in Assam and Meghalaya. About 1500 MNF activists had settled in the Rangamati area of Chittagong and had been allegedly trained by the Pakistan army. A number of Naga hostiles too were hiding in Sylhet district. The success of the Bangladesh freedom fighters put them in tight corner.[19] In early August 1971, however, the Government of Assam offered amnesty to those Mizo rebels who intended to settle down to a peaceful life. The response was slow but positive.[20]

When in December 1971 full-scale war between India and Pakistan broke out, northeast India was saved from Pakistani air raids, thanks to the pre-emptive action of the Indian air force, though considerable damage was caused by Pakistani shelling in the border areas. A Chinese military intervention was feared but did not take place in spite of some hostile gestures from China. Compared with October 1962, the Himalayas were better protected in December 1971, by snow and the Indian army. The liberation of Bangladesh is bound to reduce the defence problem of northeast India unless of course the new country becomes involved in Southeast Asian power politics.

During the war, a few hundred hostile Mizos slipped into the hilly peninsula of Burma. On the other hand, Raja Tridib Roy, a Chakma chief in the Chittagong hills who had won a seat in the Pakistan National Assembly and had joined Yahya Khan's bandwagon, remained a possible source of trouble for Bangladesh. Because of continuous smuggling, border trade between Bangladesh and India had to be restricted in October 1972.

Notes and References

1 Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, Banikanta Kakati Lectures*, 1954, Gauhati, 1955, p. 6.

2 See K.N. Dutt, *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*,Gauhati, 1958, p. 11.
3 Quoted by Mackenzie, *Historyof the Relations of the Government with the Hills Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 97. Bayley personally thought another Burmese attack improbable but drew attention to S.E. Peal's fear, expressed in a contemporary newspaper, about such a possibility.
4 Robert Reid, *Historyof the Frontier Areas Bodering on Assam from 1883–1941*,Shilong, 1942, p. 184.
5 Ibid., p. 210.
6 Ibid., pp. 213–14.
7 Ibid., p. 217.
8 Ibid., p. 240 ff.
9 Alistair Lamb, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia: Road to Lhasa*.
10 Since 1869 all the British sanads granted to the petty chiefs in the north Burma hills required them to allow the construction of a rail route between India and Burma. See Aitchison, *Treaties*, vol. I, pp. 362–72.
11 Quoted by Reid, *History*, pp. 186–87.
12 Reid, op. cit., p. 192.
13 Ibid., p. 30.
14 Ibid., pp. 255–56.
15 *Report*, vol. I, p. 177.
16 Coupland, The Constitutional Problem of India, vol. III, pp. 164–5.
17 Ibid., p. 184.
18 Reid, op. cit., p. 93.
19 See for instance, *The Statesman*,17 September 1971.
20 Ibid., 14 November 1971.

CHAPTER 14

Whither Northeast India?

The experiment with the 'autonomous' statehood of Meghalaya could not be completed due to the numerous political aspirations furthered by it. Within two years, a massive reorganisation of northeast India was undertaken. In late 1971 the President of India issued the North-East Frontier (Administration) Supplementary Regulation creating an Agency Council (later replaced by a Pradesh Council) in NEFA. The same year Parliament passed five Acts: the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, the 27th Amendment of the Constitution of India Act, the Government of the Union Territories (Amendment) Act, the Manipur Hill Areas Act, and the North-Eastern Council Act.[1]

Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya, along with the one-time British Shillong, became full fledged states. The Mizo District and the North East Frontier Tracts became the Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh respectively. Assam finally lost the territories constituting Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Outside the constitutional scheme, an agreement for the use of Shillong as the capital of Assam for a transitional period was reached by the Chief Ministers of Assam and Meghalaya. Meghalaya delegated the executive power for the maintenance of law and order in the municipal ward seating the Assam secretariat to the central government, which exercised the power through the Assam officers. The assets of the Assam government were shared with Meghalaya and Mizoram. The all-India services set up a common cadre for Assam and Meghalaya and another for Manipur and Tripura. The Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal were to be run by the all-India services until they had their own. The Union government set up advisory committees to look after the joint cadres and issues directives to the concerned states.

The Union Territories got one representative each in each House of Parliament. Meghalaya got two in the Lok Sabha, one in the Rajya Sabha. But there was no change in Assam's

total representation to Parliament. Instead, the Mikir and the north Cachar hills (formerly tagged with the Khasi–Jaintia hills for election to the Lok Sabha) had a separate Lok Sabha constituency. Members of the Lok Sabha from the constituencies of Cachar (that had included the Mizo hills) and Goalpara (that had included the Garo hills) retained their seats. MLAs from the Mizo hills lost their seats in the Assam legislature; the seats from the Khasi–Jaintia and Garo hills had fallen vacant in 1968. The Constitution of India was amended to specify the new states, their territories and their representation to the Rajya Sabha. The strength of the new state legislatures was fixed according to the formula given below in Table 14.1:

Table 14.1: Strength of the New State Legislatures in 1971

State	*Total no. of seats*	*Reserved for Scheduled Castes*	*Reserved for Scheduled Tribes*
Manipur	60	1	19
Meghalaya	60	–	50
Tripura	60	6	19

The existing High Court of Assam and Nagaland as well as the judicial commissioners' courts of Manipur and Tripura were abolished. The powers of all these courts were transferred to the common High Court for Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura, called the Gauhati High Court, which retained jurisdiction on Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The appellate judicial authority on the hill areas was *ipso facto* placed in the new High Court.

The New Union Territories

Although the Union government decided to upgrade Manipur and Tripura to states, it had obviously learnt a lesson from the Administrative Reforms Committee's study of the Union Territories. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were included in Article 240 of the Constitution of India in order to enable the Union government to make regulations for them until

they got legislatures of their own. The Government of the Union Territories (Amendment) Act made provision for the creation of a legislature in Mizoram. The Arunachal Pradesh Council created by the North East Frontier Administration (Supplementary) Regulation is by no means a legislature; it is a glorified panchayat and will remain so until Arunachal becomes politically articulate. Mizoram will also have a council of ministers as distinguished from the counsellors of the Administrator of Arunachal. Until the Government of the Union Territories (Amendment) Act was enforced, the Administrator of Mizoram ruled the territory in his discretion.

The Government of the Union Territories Act of 1963 was amended to the extent that the Administrator of a Union Territory was no longer obliged to reserve all Bills passed by a territorial legislature for the assent of the President. He acquired the power of assent more or less equally with a state Governor. However, a special responsibility in respect of border security, to be discharged in his discretion, devolved on the Administrator of the Union Territory of Mizoram. The 27th Amendment of the Constitution also granted the Administrator of a Union Territory ordinance making power. For Arunachal Pradesh the only change was an Administrator of its own instead of the Governor of Assam acting, in his discretion, as the agent of the central government, the sole link that it had with Assam.

The Diminishing District Council

The former part B tribal areas never had a district council. They are now out of the Sixth Schedule. The former part A tribal areas were regrouped in three categories. The tribal areas within Assam came under part I, those within Meghalaya under part II and those within Mizoram under part III. The functional autonomy of the district councils was reduced in 1969 but the Government of Assam assigned further functions to the district councils within them. Their positions remain unaltered. The district councils within Meghalaya retain the old executive powers but are subjected to the overwhelming legislative authority of Meghalaya. Shillong's status *vis-a-vis* the district council did not alter. With the emergence of Meghalaya as

an *almost entirely* 'tribal state', the district councils within it turned full circle and became as good as local boards.

Why then is the district council retained in Meghalaya? One consequence of this retention would be an increase in political appointments. Secondly, and especially when opposing political parties control the state government and the district councils, there would be tensions between the two levels of power. Thirdly, this political tension could easily be aggravated and vitiated by inter-ethnic tensions. It has been noted that the early progressive character of the district council was lost when it became the stereotype of ethnic division.

The Mizo District Council was dissolved. The Reorganisation Act authorised the Governor/Administrator of Assam/Meghalaya/ Mizoram to create any autonomous region. The Mizoram Administrator was further authorised to split an autonomous region. Till the creation of a legislature in Mizoram this power would be exercised in his discretion. Further, the Governor/ Administrator would have the extraordinary constituent power of making the necessary adjustments in paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule consequent upon such creation/splitting. With the coming of the Mizoram legislature, the existing 'autonomous region' was split into three 'autonomous districts'. As in Meghalaya, so also in Mizoram, the district council was subordinated to the state/territorial legislature, but the image of the old district council survives. Moreover, the district councils within Assam, retaining much of the old power, are examples in contrast with the former's diminished status. Their multiplication created problems. The President got the power to bar any parliamentary legislation from an autonomous district. The Administrator got a similar power over territorial legislations, besides a veto power over cabinet decisions affecting the autonomous districts.

Manipur and Tripura being promoted to full statehood were entitled to the provisions of the Fifth Schedule but no scheduled area was proclaimed there. For the Manipur hill areas the 27th Amendment of the Constitution provided for a 'committee of the Legislative Assembly...consisting of members of that Assembly elected from the Hill Areas' (Article 371C). The President can modify the governmental rules of business and the rules of procedure of the Legislative Assembly and can provide for 'any

special responsibility' of the Governor in order to secure proper functioning of such a committee. A similar provision had existed there since 1963. In Tripura the tribal blocks retained their miserable existence.

Of some importance was the creation of district councils in Manipur by the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act of 1971. The Governor was authorised to create a maximum of six autonomous districts within the hill areas of the state, to exclude from their jurisdiction any area intended to be a municipality, cantonment or town committee, increase or diminish their areas and define their boundaries. He can unite two or more such districts as well as parts of any two or more of them and make incidental changes. In all such cases he must consult the committee for the hill areas in the Manipur legislature.

Each district will have a district council with a maximum of 18 elected and two nominated members, one of whom is to be the chairman, another the vice-chairman. The first chairman can be nominated by the government for a tenure of one year. There is no provision for an executive committee. The councils have no legislative power. They can only make recommendations to the government about legislations on appointment and succession of chiefs, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce and social custom. They have been given the power to levy tax on professions, trades, callings and employments, animals, vehicles (other than the mechanically propelled ones) and boats. Tolls can be collected from entry of goods and markets, passengers and goods carried by ferries. Taxes permitted by the state list of the Seventh Schedule to the Indian Constitution, but not covered by state measures, can also be collected by the councils. The councils can raise school fees and fees for the benefit of services rendered by them. The powers are hardly different from those of the local boards. The first election to the District Councils was held in 1973. Between 1989 and 2009, however, no election was held due to political violence in the hills.

North-Eastern Council

It was the rejection of the Pataskar Commission Report that made the balkanisation of northeast India a distinct possibility.

In 1966, for the first time the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, floated the scheme for a North-Eastern Council to check the evil consequences of this eventuality. After passing the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, therefore, the Indian Parliament passed the first North-Eastern Council Act of 1970. It was proposed to have a North-Eastern Council with these members: the Governor of Assam as chairman, the Administrators of the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura, the Chief Ministers of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura, a minister each from Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland, and the adviser to Governor of Assam (the real administrator of NEFA). However, the participation of Nagaland was not immediately anticipated.

After promising full statehood to Manipur and Tripura, the Government of India planned a new North-Eastern Council under a kind of 'super-governor' for all these states with discretionary power. The proposed 'discretion' was opposed by all the units and the plan had to be revised before a fresh North-Eastern Council Act was passed in 1971 replacing the previous Act (which had not been enforced). The Act was enforced on 1 August 1972.

At last the North-Eastern Council emerged as an advisory body for balanced and coordinated development of the seven states in the region through interstate collaboration and central assistance. Originally, its membership consisted of the Governor of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura as chairman, the Chief Ministers of the same states, the Administrator and Chief Minister of Mizoram, and the Administrator and a counsellor of Arunachal Pradesh. The assumption that there would continue to be a common governor for the five states, the reason behind making him the ex-officio chairman of the council, was proved wrong. Nagaland demanded a separate governor and other states soon followed suit. The idea of a common chairman for the council had to be abandoned. In 1987, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh attained full statehood with governors of full rank and status. In 2002 Sikkim joined the Council. Thereafter, the council comprised:

(i) The person or persons for the time being holding the office of the Governor of the States;
(ii) The Chief Ministers of the states of Arunachal Pradesh,

Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura;

Provided that, if there is no council of ministers in any of these states, the President may nominate not more than one person to represent such state in the Council for so long as there is no council of ministers in such state;

(iii) And three members to be nominated by the President.

The President shall nominate the chairman of the Council. The President may, if (s)he deems it necessary to do so, nominate another member of the Council to act as vice-chairman of the Council. The President is, thus, free to nominate anyone as the chairman of the NEC while the choice of the vice-chairman is confined to the members of the council. As of now, the Union minister in charge of the Department of the North Eastern Region (DoNER) holds that position. The NEC has been recognised as a regional planning body. The Union government directed each of its ministries to allocate 10 per cent of their developmental budget to northeastern affairs. A 'Northeast Roadmap 2020' prepared in 2005 sought to connect the developmental scheme for the region with India's 'Look East' policy. The instrumentality of chairmanship of the Council being held by a Union minister has increased the central government's control on the Council. The special position of the Governor of Assam envisaged in the original Act has been abolished, though individual governors have retained their special responsibilities with regard to peace and security of their states.[2]

It should be noted that the North-Eastern Council differs from the zonal councils founded in November 1956 which has the Prime Minister of India as chairman and does not include the state Governors. The governors and the administrators in the Council will expectedly play the role of liaison persons of the Centre. The presence of the central minister will enhance the Centre's control on the Council. The proceedings of its meetings are to be sent to the Union government. The Council will have a secretariat, including a planning adviser and a security adviser. Officers of the Union government in the Ministries of Defence, Finance, Home Affairs and Planning are to attend its meetings. The Central government will evidently play a crucial role in it.

Besides the advisory power on regional planning, the Council has the power to review and recommend measures for the maintenance of security and public order in the states. The Central government will naturally be in close touch with the problems of economic planning and security of the region. The recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission have not been forgotten. The Act conferred the responsibility of formulating a coordinated regional plan and discussing 'any matter' of common interest in the field of economic and social planning, inter-state transport and communications and flood control projects, and the power to recommend financial assistance of the Central government as well as measures for the implementation of the regional planning, security and public order.

Finally, although the council's recommendations are not obligatory for the member states, they may be channelled through the Central government as its 'directives' under Article 257 of the Constitution of India. Violation of such directives may subject the states to the declaration of constitutional breakdown. The North-Eastern Council is a new experiment in inter-state and Centre–state relations. The ramifications of the 1972 reorganisation are even more significant than those of the 1956 reorganisation of India.

Elections: 1972

From the very beginning, however, prospects for the success of the scheme seemed to be mixed. Within 50 days of the reorganisation *The Statesman*'s editorial carried a warning on 'the explosive northeast'.[3] The editorial had been occasioned by an unprecedented armed confrontation between the armed police forces of Assam and Nagaland on their border. But this turned out to be only the beginning of a series of crises involving northeast India, the ground for which had been paved at the very time of reorganisation.

Sometime before the reorganisation, an officer of the Assam government toured the Mizo hills and received demands for the creation of three autonomous districts to the south and south-east of Mizoram.[4] They were promptly granted. On 29 April

1972, the twelve-member Pawi–Lakher Regional Council was reconstituted into three district councils with four members each. Two members were nominated to each council. One of the councils (of Lakher District) went to the Mara Freedom Party, the other two, thanks to the gratitude of Chakma settlers and the merger of the Chin National Front with the Congress, to that party.

On the eve of reorganisation, a move for the separation of Cachar from Assam was initiated by some dissident Congress members but fizzled out. The high drama of northeast Indian politics shifted to the Brahmaputra valley. Shortly before the 1972 elections, Mahendra Mohan Choudhury, successor to Chaliha, was made to resign from the chief ministership of Assam and Sarat Chandra Sinha, a Rajbanshi from Goalpara, succeeded him with the support of the Central leadership. There was hardly more than a murmur on the spectacular change, and the new leadership won the Assembly elections with a thumping majority, the performance being explained in journalist circles as solely because of the 'Indira wave'. The smouldering fire was indicated only by the fact that no Assamese caste-Hindu joined his cabinet. The only significant aspect of the elections was the election of a candidate of the Plains Tribal Council, an organisation of the non-Congress Bodo Kacharis of Goalpara, and a candidate of the Ujani Asom Rajya Parishad (a variation of the Ahom–Tai Mongoliya Rajya Parishad, an organisation of the Ahom–Tai groups of upper Assam demanding a separate state).

In Tripura too, there was a reshuffle on the eve of the elections in the Congress organisation, and Sachindralal Sinha, erstwhile leader of the party, was denied the Congress ticket. Its performance was good in the open constituencies (35 out of 37 seats not reserved for scheduled tribes went to the party) but poor in the reserved seats (6 out of 19). The other 13 seats went to the CPI(M) which gave a poor account of itself in the open seats (three on its own ticket and two independents with its support). The CPI won one open seat. The Tripura Upajatiya Juba Samiti (Tribal Youth Association) and the Jana Sangh were defeated.

In Manipur, on the other hand, the dissident Congress members offered stiff resistance through the Manipur People's

Party which won 15 out of 41 seats in the plains and none in the hills. The Congress also won 15 seats in the plains but only two in the hills. The Naga Integration Council and its supporters won six seats in the northern hills. In the southern hills, the Kuki National Assembly had been split in 1971 when one of its leaders, Paokai Haokip, won the single reserved Lok Sabha seat on a Congress ticket. In 1972 his younger brother, Paolin Haokip, was elected to the Assembly on a Kuki National Assembly ticket. The younger Kukis formed a Mizo Integration Council which contested two Assembly seats, one successfully. Other groups like the Hmar National Union and the Paite National Council set up candidates in particular areas. All such 'independents' won 13 seats. Most of the independents and the Naga Integration Council joined the People's Party to form a United Front that captured the state government. In the subsequent phase of political horse trading, on 31 July 1972, the Naga Integration Council accused the United Front government of neglecting Naga interests and joined hands with Congress. The Kuki National Assembly MLA, on the other hand, first joined the Congress and then crossed over to the United Front. One interesting aspect of the Front's politics was the choice of a Muslim as the Chief Minister in a Hindu–Christian state.

The Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee was inaugurated on 20 January 1972, with the support of Indira Gandhi, and although some APHLC leaders felt personally obliged to her, the APHLC–Congress understanding in the Assembly elections took place only after tough bargaining. There was no agreement in the Jaintia District. In the Khasi hills all its four candidates won mainly with the support of non-Khasi voters (three in the open constituencies of Shillong and one in a Gorkha- dominated reserved constituency. This last man later joined the APHLC). In the Garo District it lost one seat to an independent and won five others. Shortly after the elections there was some talk about their merger but the alliance broke down during the Khasi Hills District Council election, mainly due to personal and factional rivalries between those constituents of the Khasi National Conference and the EITU which constitute the APHLC in the Khasi hills. The reason for the failure in the Jaintia District was the overestimation of Congress strength. After the elections, defections started in favour of the APHLC though in the Khasi

Hills District Council, with tacit Congress support (four seats), the Hill States People's Democratic Party (12 seats) ousted the APHLC (11 seats) from power. In the district council elections the Congress returned two Bengalis from Shillong – for the first time in the history of the district council.[5]

Indira Gandhi inaugurated the Union Territory of Mizoram with some pointed words aimed at those who had pasted posters on her route, demanding full statehood. The Mizo Congress had once demanded it. But these posters were the work of the Mizo Labour Party, formed by Bawichhuaka who had left the Mizo Union in September 1971, after being defeated in the elections for the Mizo Union presidentship. After Indira Gandhi other central leaders visited the territory, ostensibly keeping in view the territorial Assembly elections. Bawichhuaka's party demanded 'maximum autonomy' for Mizoram without defining the extent of such autonomy. In the 30-member Assembly the Mizo Union won 21 seats, the Congress won six and independents three. The Hmar revolt led by Bawichhuaka, against Lusei dominance in the Mizo Union, was thus aborted.

In the wake of the Assembly elections a movement for the unification of the Mikir areas with Nagaland in the name of a Mikir Nationalist Party was started. One of its leaders was the independent challenger of G.G. Swell in the 1971 Lok Sabha elections, who had failed in spite of unofficial support from the APCC. The movement, however, had little chance of succeeding. In spite of the assumed ethnic identity of the Mikir with the Naga,[6] stronger cultural factors stand between them.

Hill politics in northeast India was somewhat complicated by the inept handling of the situation by the Congress leadership. The founding of the party in Arunachal Pradesh was frowned upon by the administration which still hesitates to admit 'politics' in its domestic jurisdiction. In 1973 'Congressisation' of northeast India was undertaken in a big way. In April, one of its general secretaries toured the hill areas and the Mizo Union took a decision to merge with the Congress by 1977. In October the state unit of the Congress reluctantly endorsed the move though Mizo Congressites would be simply swept by the Mizo Unionists in the case of a merger. In Meghalaya a similar invitation was extended to the APHLC. Before any decision could be reached, G.G. Swell appeared on the scene, first advocating

the merger and then starting a virtual war against the APHLC. At an extraordinary conference of the APHLC in July 1973, the merger proposal was turned down. In October Swell was expelled from the APHLC. In Nagaland the Naga Nationalist Organisation turned down the merger offer.

Violence

Ever since the appointment of an adviser to the Ministry of Home Affairs on the Assam–Nagaland boundary dispute, in August 1971,[7] Nagaland had enjoyed relative peace for a considerable period of time, so much so that during the Bangladesh operation (December 1971), the army was withdrawn from that state. When on 1 June 1972 Nagaland was transferred from the charge of the Ministry of External Affairs to that of the Home Ministry, there was only nominal criticism by the opposition Democratic Front. On 31 July, at a press conference the Chief Minister welcomed the move. Meanwhile, on 19 July when Robert Trumbull of *The New York Times* visited Kohima, he noted that:

> despite various widely expressed grievances against New Delhi, the violent agitation for independence that once flared in forests and thatched roof villages has been dampened down by a considerate Government policy of economic and social development.[8]

This must have convinced the underground Nagas of the need for acting fast. On 8 August, the Chief Minister's party was ambushed on its way from Dimapur to Kohima, resulting in one death. It was the third unsuccessful attempt on Hokise Sema's life. A stern warning was issued from the office of the Governor to the underground and to the handful of opposition leaders who were alleged to be seeking political advantage through an unholy alliance with the underground, and from 1 September extension of the period of suspension of operation against the underground was stopped. Simultaneously, the Federal Government of Nagaland, the Naga 'army' and the Naga National Council were banned. Soon Sema went to New York as a member of the Indian delegation to the United Nations

and on 12 October a number of opposition MLAs, including T.N. Angami, former Chief Minister, and S.C. Jamir, a former Union deputy minister, were rounded up. The army was back in Nagaland amidst reports of fresh infiltration of China-trained Nagas. Yet, the government attained the peak of success on 16 August 1973, when the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland dissolved itself, its president pledging loyalty to the Constitution of India.

A much greater crisis loomed on the horizon of Assam. Sarat Chandra Sinha, the new Chief Minister, was a Rajbanshi (one of the 'other backward classes', ethnically akin to the Bodo Kacharis) and hailed from the district of Goalpara. Politics in Assam after Independence has been dominated by upper caste Hindus from the districts of Kamrup, Sibsagar and Nowgong. But Sinha's greatest weakness was his image as a usurper carrying the blessings of Indira Gandhi to whom the hard core of the Assam Congress only paid lip service. Language politics came in handy for obstructing his functioning.

Language politics in Assam has had a long history at least since the 1921 reforms. Till that year, census records showed not more than 22 per cent Assamese speaking people in the province. In 1931 the figure jumped to 31.6 per cent and in 1951 to 56.7 per cent. On the eve of each census after Independence, Assam has had a language riot helping its disintegration.[9] Since 1967 Assam had been planning to shift over to the regional language as the medium of instruction at the university stage and Rs one crore was sanctioned by the University Grants Commission to the state. At a meeting of the State Coordination Committee constituted for the purpose of preparing textbooks in the regional language, held at Shillong on 6 March 1971 with Chief Minister M.M. Choudhury in the chair, it was decided to adopt both Assamese and Bengali. On 6 June 1972, the academic court of Gauhati University resolved that English or Assamese would be used as the medium of instruction, though students would have the freedom to write their answers in Assamese, English, Bengali or Hindi.[10] This ignited a students' agitation and the decision was promptly revised on June 12.[11] The option for the use of English was restricted to a maximum of ten years and the options for writing answers were dropped, resulting in two kinds of movements. Cachar had a series of *bandhs* (strikes)

demanding the use of Bengali as the medium of instruction and answer writing. Assamese student demonstrators, on the other hand, compelled some of the colleges in the Brahmaputra valley to exclusively adopt Assamese.

A number of judicial suits were filed in the Supreme Court and stay orders were issued. In August an Assam Linguistic Minorities' Rights Committee was formed at the initiative of the Bengalis but with the chairman of the North Cachar District Council, Sonaram Thousen (a Congressite), as president. Charan Narzari, the secretary of the Assam Plains Tribal Councils,[12] (an organisation of non-Congress Bodo Kacharis), became its vice-president. Sarat Chandra Sinha rushed to New Delhi and on 23 September a resolution, believed to have been blessed by the central government, was passed in the Assembly 'unanimously' to the effect that English should continue to be used indefinitely in Gauhati University, in addition to Assamese, and the Central government would be approached for help to set up a university in Cachar with territorial jurisdiction.[13]

From 22 September to 24 September, an All-Assam Students' Convention was in session at Gauhati. The convention rejected the Assembly resolution. An action committee of the Gauhati University teachers rejected the resolution on 23 September itself. The All-Assam Students' Union Convention, called for an Assam *bandh* on 5 October. On that day large-scale violence broke out in the state.[14] The extremists demanded separation of Cachar before it was given a university where, presumably, Bengali would be used.

Cachar's reaction was peculiar; it opposed separation. The Bengalis in Cachar appeared to be defending the rights of the Bengalis in the Brahmaputra valley. But there was another consideration. The Bengali Hindus form the biggest group in Cachar but are not in an absolute majority. The combined strength of the Bengali Muslims and the Hindi speaking tea garden workers exceeds theirs. The Cachar Hindus may favour union with Tripura whose Bengali leaders do not want them. Unless driven to the wall, Cachar would not favour separation.

Language politics in Assam has been entangled with two forces, communalism[15] and factionalism. Culturally Assam

means the pre-British Ahom territory in the Brahmaputra valley from Kamrup eastwards. As early as 1853 Maniram Dutta Barowa Dewan complained to A.J. Moffat-Mills against the British policy of employing Bengalis in government services in Assam.[16] In 1874 with the inclusion of Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara in the Chief Commissioner's Province of Assam, an incongruity between the cultural and the political frontiers of the province developed. Subsequent contact with Goalpara and the adoption of the Assamese language, at least officially, by the Muslim settlers in the Brahmaputra valley partially mitigated the conflict in Goalpara.[17] But since the days of the dyarchy, Muslim settlement itself became a subject of controversy in Assam.[18] In 1968 there was a ministerial crisis in Assam when the state government started 'evicting the infiltrators'. The Bengali Hindus generally refused to record Assamese as their language in the censuses. Paradoxically, those among them who have learnt Assamese well are not regarded as 'Assamese'.

The North Cachar Hills District Council and the North Cachar Hills Congress Committee, at a joint meeting in December, demanded separation of the district from Assam in case Assamese was forced upon them.[19] In the Mikir hills, for quite some time there were three MLAs. One of them was the chief executive member of the district council, and the two others were ministers of Assam. One minister was dropped by Sinha. Consequently, the chief executive member was toppled by the retrenched minister who had the support of the Mikir Hills Youth Congress. Soon they formed an alliance with the non-Congress groups and demanded the continuation of English or separation of the Mikir hills from Assam.[20] Another reorganisation became probable for Assam. The Central government tried to pour oil over troubled waters by converting an old plan for a hill university into that for a central university. Due to the combined opposition of Assam and Meghalaya to the proposal to give it jurisdiction on Assam, the plan had to be confined to Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Even that did not work long. Within three decades all the northeastern states had their separate universities supported by the Centre. NEHU was reduced to a central university for Meghalaya.

Notes and References

1 *The Statesman*, 28 October 1971. The Chakma, the Lakher and the Pawi autonomous districts were created by the Mizoram District Councils (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 1972. The last two autonomous districts were renamed 'Mara' and 'Lai' in 1988.

2 The latest amendment was the North Eastern Council Act, 2002, Act 68 of 2002 of 23 December 2002.

3 *The Statesman*, 3 April 1972.

4 P.L. Thanzawma, 'On to the Union Territory', *The Amrit Bazar Patrika*, Mizoram Supplement, 21 January 1972.

5 See S.K. Chaube, 'Recent Trends in Khasi Politics', *North-Eastern Affairs*, Shillong, July–September 1972.

6 Sir Charles Lyall, who edited, arranged and supplemented Edward Stack's *The Mikirs*, London, 1908, noted (p. 172) cultural affinities of the Mikir with the southern Nagas, especially the Tangkhuls of Manipur. Their links with the people of the Brahmaputra valley are, however, no less remarkable.

7 The Naga Hills District was originally carved out of the Nowgong District of Assam. With the expansion of the former eastward, numerous border changes took place down to 1925. Nagaland's border with Manipur was worked out through a series of treaties with the Manipur Raja between 1835 and 1877. The Nagas want to undo both the arrangements but are keener on the Assam border. On the other hand, the North Cachar Hills District Council demands the return of Dimapur, Nagaland's only railhead. It was once the capital of the Kachari kingdom, and transferred to the Naga Hills District in 1915.

8 Reproduced in Citizen Voice, Kohima (weekly), 18 August 1972.

9 See S.K. Chaube, 'Language Politics in Assam', *North-Eastern Affairs*, October–December 1972.

10 'On University Medium – A Retrospect,' a Government of Assam advertisement in *The Assam Tribune*, 21 October 1972.

11 In November 1972, while suspending the agitation, the All- Assam Students' Union brought out a virtual charge sheet against Sarat Chandra Sinha whose assurances to Bengalis in Cachar, at the end of May, were held responsible for the language troubles. See *The Assam Tribune*, 17 November 1972.

12 In a *Memorandum to Bharatratna Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, New Delhi, by The Plains Tribal Council*

of Assam, dated 22 October 1972, it was alleged that 'The Plains Tribal people of Assam have been systematically uprooted from their own soil. During the last twenty-five years of Independence thousands of them have become landless and homeless.'

13 *The Assam Tribune*, 24 September 1972.

14 See S.K. Chaube, 'Anatomy of a Language Riot', *The National Herald*, New Delhi, 7 November 1972.

15 *A Representation to the Chief Minister of Assam from the Linguistic Minorities' Rights Committee*, dated 20 September 1972, spoke of a pressure strategy 'practised occasionally on linguistic minorities in the Brahmaputra valley by a section of people since the inter-community tension of 1948.'

16 The ninth point of the dewan's memorandum was that 'Under the revenue settlement of Military Officers while a number of respectable Assamese are out of employ, the inhabitants of Marwar and Bengalees from Sylhet have been appointed to Mouzadarships; and for us respectable Assamese to become *ryots* (tenants) of such foreigners is a source of deep mortification.' The dewan was later sentenced to death by the British on a charge of conspiracy to wage war against the government.

17 See S.K. Chaube, 'Assam: Heart-searching on Language Problem', *Mainstream*, 2 December 1972.

18 K.N. Dutta, op, cit., p. 101.

19 *The Statesman*, 12 December 1972.

20 See *The Implanter*, 21 October 1972.

CHAPTER 15

Basis of Autonomy

Within two decades of Independence, the northeast Indian hills were transformed from a paradise for anthropologists to a hotbed of politics. Though the Bardoloi subcommittee rightly noted the emerging political aspirations in the region, the later policy of the government became coloured by a rather obscure inclination to fuse the social and political aspects of the hills problem. In a way, this was a legacy of the anthropological approach of our former rulers. The rationale of the Government of India's stand was supplied by the States Reorganisation Commission which, faced with the myriad demands for linguistic states, haunted by apprehensions about the defence of a new and problem-ridden multicommunal nation, and guided by the passion of the integrationist geopolitician, K.M. Panikkar, characterised the hill state demand as a problem 'at least as much psychological as political'. Besides the 'separatist pull of the extremist elements', the factors that promoted the demand were, to the SRC:

(i) suspicion and distrust of the people of the plains by the tribal people of these areas;
(ii) the diversity of races and cultures and the different levels of social, educational and political development in the different areas of this region which have prevented the tribal people from coming up to the level of the people in the plains;
(iii) lack of communications in these areas which has made it difficult for the various tribes to come in close contact with the rest of India; and
(iv) the economic backwardness of the region.[1]

It was, however, the Pataskar Commission which gave the government policy the most absurd twist. Believing that dissatisfaction with the economic progress of the hill areas was 'at the root of the unsatisfactory general relationship' between

the hills and the plains of Assam,[2] the commission overlooked the subtle political articulation of this discontent.

The problem of the hill areas has been somewhat complicated by the presence of security difficulties in a relatively inaccessible area[3] with which suspicion about foreign Christian missions and foreign agents have been mixed up. More recently, almost every foreign power which has been suspected to disfavour India's progress is assumed to be involved in the politics of these regions. What is overlooked is that foreign influences cannot seriously affect a society unless native conditions are receptive to them. Besides, the assumption of a continued loyalty of the hill people to the departed British rulers is neither complimentary to the competence of the democratic national government that has succeeded in inspiring a new sense of belonging, nor to the noted self-respect of the hill people who never accepted British domination with complacency. To be fair, however, it should be stated that for a newly liberated country obsessed with a vast security problem, it was easy to be hurt at the British granting political asylum to A.Z. Phizo and Michael Scott's meddling in Naga politics.

But to throw a blanket accusation for all political ills at the Christian missions is to ignore the organisational conflict among their various units. In the faction-ridden hill societies of today, the Church can hardly afford to be politically committed except possibly to two ideas: peace and opposition to communism. At the time of the transfer of power, though the foreign missionaries generally supported the Coupland plan, many of the Mizo pastors were actively with the Mizo Union that supported continued union with India. Later, though the extremist Mizo leader, Lal Denga, used the cross as his seal, he could not win the blessings of the Church. In the Naga hills Phizo invoked the name of Christianity but did not succeed in getting its support. In the fifties, the foreign missionaries were removed from the district and in 1963, when the involvement of China in Naga politics became known, the Church issued circulars condemning the alliance. The persistence of the underground movement despite repudiation by the Church proves the secular character of the movement. In the predominantly Hindu Imphal valley, on the other hand, as late as 1970, a Meithei State Council threatened secession unless statehood was conceded to Manipur.

Social anthropologists, on the other hand, have frequently been tempted to reduce the causes of the complicated hills problem to 'tribalism' without clearly defining the term. If it means technological backwardness it becomes difficult to distinguish many of the northeastern hill people from their neighbours in the plains. If, on the other hand, it means a kinship orientation of social relations, as Lewis Morgan would have it,[4] the social structures of most of the hill people are in the melting pot and the limits of endogamy have frequently been violated. Among the Garo a distinct group – the Momin – has developed, it is alleged, through cross-marriage with the Muslim settlers. Khasi legends ascribe some siemships to Muslim ancestry. During the 1901 census, many in the Lushai hills failed to identify their clans. On the other hand, many hill people since the pre-British days have settled in the neighbouring plains and have assumed Hindu caste symbols or Islamic faith.

If the aspirations of the hill people are to be conceptualised on a single scale, the measure would be called 'a quest for identity'. At one end of it is the demand for district autonomy within the existing states like Assam and Manipur. At the other are the movements for independence like those of Phizo and Lal Denga, which aim at a 'sovereign' Nagaland and Mizoram. What is more important is to note that, although autonomy is a particular form of external relation, its need is felt at a particular stage in the internal development of a community and can never be an independent demand. Precisely because of this, the hill people of Tripura are fighting for a constitutional guarantee for their land and the Kuki are identifying themselves with the statehood demand of Manipur and yet talking of district autonomy. Articulate public opinion in Meghalaya was not satisfied with the autonomous state which indeed separated it from Assam for all practical purposes. The nature of the political aspirations of the hill people would, therefore, have to be assessed in the context of the stages of socioeconomic development of the different groups. What appear to be 'tribal solidarity movements' have a definite socio-economic content.

National apprehensions about the hill people's movements arose out of the sundry demands for independence voiced at the time of the transfer of power. A close scrutiny of those demands would, however, rule out any blanket condemnation of the hill

people. The demands were by no means universal but came from a particular section, whereas positively integrationist forces expressed themselves equally if not more powerfully.

A hill society is a minority group with limited opportunities in the wide open world before it. Most of its apprehensions about 'others' are conditioned by a Promethean reflex. The failure of the British administration to bring the society under a complete and uniform administration perpetuated its isolation in different degrees, though the inexorable process within the society worked out its own law. From time to time, hostile intrusions by alien groups of tribal as well as non-tribal exploiters aggravated the suspicions that the British administrators looked upon them quite favourably. That the tribals are not 'given to' hatred is illustrated by the fact that whereas they never liked the British rulers, they still consider themselves indebted to the western missionaries.

The mainstream of the hills movement today can be characterised as 'sub-national'. Its goal is a respectable position on the national map for the simple hill people who acquired western education in greater numbers than many of their plains neighbours, and who feel they are as modern as any other group. This feeling could be sensed by the author when, at a seminar on national integration in February 1970, a senior APHLC leader quoted the late communist leader, Ajoy Ghosh, to stress that the rub of the hills–plains relations lay in the absence of equality.

This urge for equality is projected both on the plane of economic opportunities, in respect of employment and enterprise, and on that of political status. Those who have placed their stake on both are the up and coming middle class. This class can be a stabilising force in any country if its legitimate aspirations are fulfilled. Its frustration can be equally perilous in its consequences, and undermine the faith in a common destiny.[5]

Tradition and Modernism

It was Myron Weiner who introduced the concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernism' in Indian politics, suggesting that 'many of its conflicts are less over questions of group interest – narrowly conceived – than over the process of modernisation ... and

the political structure which has been created to further the process.' He recognised the semantic problem involved in the formulation and chose to be 'arbitrary' in identifying the 'modern' with the 'western oriented or westernised' elite. He placed in this category 'those who favour a unified national state, large-scale economic development and are concerned with making substantial modifications in the social structure'. Yet he warned against 'looking upon the tradition as static, western influence as dynamic' and considering all change 'a result of outside stimuli.'[6]

It is in the actual application of this dichotomy in the context of the hill societies that difficulties arise. Hill leaders of all shades fervently speak of economic development. All of them speak of autonomy (if with differing connotations). Except for the Mizo Union in 1948, practically no party spelt out any socio-economic programme. And almost all educated or/and affluent hill people opt for a western way of life. Most of them live in the administrative centres, possess modern gadgets and can speak English. Yet, there is a remarkable absence of a scientific attitude towards life. An educated Christian may believe every word of a half-educated preacher and yet practise indigenous rites when threatened by epidemics. In public professions one notes the tendency to enjoy the best of both worlds. Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, for instance, married an American lady but chose to live in the Mylliem area of Shillong and was the most zealous 'Khasi' politician of his time. Phizo stood for the 'traditional' Naga way of life but his personal sophistication rivalled that of any westerner. His family sought and secured financial assistance from the Assam government and one of his daughters married a north Indian army officer and left the Naga hills.

The modernist hill leaders are as eager as their 'traditionalist' counterparts to interpret their own roles, in complete identity with the 'real' culture and tradition of their respective groups. There is a propensity for differential migration in both sections of the elite, subject to two limitations. First, accessibility to the caste-ridden plains societies is extremely limited. Secondly, the politically ambitious among them realise the advantage of 'staying with their own people' if a tangible leadership is desired. It is such conflicting behaviour which confirms one in the belief that the tradition–modernism dichotomy is rooted in a conflict

of interests.[7] When this author asked two Khasi leaders of the APHLC – one formerly of Nichols-Roy's National Conference and the other of the Khasi–Jaintia Durbar – the first replied that one-third of the Khasi population was landless and the second held that, in the egalitarian Khasi society, there was no concentration of land.

The modernist leadership, it has been pointed out, came from an embryonic middle class comprising teachers, local pastors, professionals, contractors and traders, and was symbolised in the Khasi National Conference, the Mizo Union and the Naga National Council (before Phizo). When they spoke of autonomy of the hill people through the district council, they aimed at destroying the vested interests of the chiefs and bringing the hill people closer to the national mainstream. Their 'autonomy' was more regional than ethnic. The chiefs and the government employees formed the hard core of the 'traditional' leadership. The Khasi National Durbar in the later period, the United Mizo Freedom Organisation and the Naga National Council under Phizo spoke of autonomy and tradition only to mean the preservation of the rights of chiefs against the onslaught of institutionalised democracy. Yet, the chiefs have been the first to violate the social customs (which uniformly upheld communal ownership of land) and have everywhere usurped communal land.

Speaking of the emerging nations, S.C. Dube observes: 'A section of their elite upholds tradition not for nostalgia alone but for its vote-getting and opinion-swaying potential. Another section of the leadership has a vested interest in tradition.'[8] Phizo and Lal Denga belong to the first category, the chiefs to the second. A clear demarcation between the 'traditional' and 'modern' leadership, however, would always be difficult if not impossible in view of the numerous compromises that are made in actual politics and the failure of the hill parties to formulate any economic blueprint for their areas. The only structural change that the APHLC-controlled Meghalaya government proposed in the first year, for instance, was regrouping of the Garo villages. Even this scheme was effectively blocked by the Garo chiefs.

With Independence, as Nirmal Kumar Bose noted, two changes in the character of tribal leadership in India occurred.

'The institutions which have been responsible for the regulation of peoples' lives have altered in character. Moreover, where they were once ruled by hereditary chiefs, they have now become progressively subjected to democratic control.' In effect, both the form and the mode of operation of the institutions have been subjected to progressive transformation.[9] In the Assam hills the district council, an elective local body, challenged the hereditary and customary authorities and a confrontation became inevitable. With the adventurist offensive of reaction arose the leadership of Phizo and Lal Denga. Adventurists and opportunists apart, the rising middle class rallied round the district council. Autonomy meant, to the former, an escape from the democratic sweep of the national government and, to the latter, a protected economic growth within regional boundaries. The numerous compromises that impeded the working of the district council produced not one but many hill state demands. The hill areas of Manipur and Tripura were naturally affected by these changes though not to any alarming degree.

For Assam the quest for identity appears to be progressing through a process of elimination. The composite culture of the state is disintegrating with the diminution of its size. The separation of the Cachar, North Cachar and Mikir Hills Districts will not give the state a unilingual character. The district of Goalpara remains beyond the state's cultural frontiers which have not really expanded beyond the territorial frontiers of pre-British Assam. Even this territory has lost its internal cohesion since the British days. Immigrants, refugees, 'plains tribals' and 'other backward classes' are consolidating themselves as 'political minorities'. The reconciliation of these minorities is the precondition for a unilingual 'Assamese' culture which the elite of Assam have been vainly searching for.

Notes and References

1 *Report* of the States Reorganisation Commission, p. 185.
2 *Report* of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, pp. 125–26.
3 Of course, the security aspect of the problem was not entirely ignored by the Bardoloi subcommittee which recommended that

the Governor, at his discretion, could annul or suspend an Act or Resolution of a district council or regional council and take steps if he was satisfied that it was 'likely to endanger the safety of India'. The Governor's action was subject to confirmation by the state legislaturc. The Sixth Schedule omitted the discretion.

4 From Lewis H. Morgan *(Ancient Society*, New York, 1871) to A. L. Kroeber *(Anthropology*, New York, 1923) the emphasis on kinship orientation of tribal societies continued. Recent anthropologists, however, tend to revert to the meaning the Romans originally attached to it, that is, a territorial group (see the *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*: 'Tribal Culture'). Melville Jacobs and Bernhard J. Stern *(General Anthropology*, New York, eighth printing, 1960, p. 326) described 'tribe' as a term 'employed with no general agreement or precise definition, but often applied to a community or cluster of communities characterised by a common territory, language and cultural heritage, on a technological level inferior to groups such as the Aztecs, ancient Egyptians and Greeks.'

5 A young and educated former leader of the Kuki National Assembly told the author that the Kukis' main grievance is that they are not mentioned in the Constitution of India. According to the Scheduled Tribes Order of 1960, Kukis are recognised as a category of scheduled tribes within Assam but not within Manipur where their subgroups are categorised.

6 Myron Weiner, 'Some Hypotheses on the Politics of Modernization' in R.L. Park and Irene Tinker (ed.), *Leadership and Political Institutions in India*, Oxford University Press, 1960, pp. 18–20.

7 Among the 'articulate groups' of the Asian elite, according to Gunnar Myrdal, 'there is a unanimous support, on a very general plane, for changing institutions and attitudes, but there is also escapism, particularly with regard to specific issues'. *(Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of the Nations*, vol. I, p. 63).

8 S.C. Dube's 'Foreword' in L.P. Vidyarthi (ed.), *Leadership in India*, Bombay, 1967, p. vii.

9 Nirmal Kumar Bose, 'Changing Character of Leadership in India', ibid., pp. 89–90.

POSTSCRIPT I

Northeast India at the End of the Millenium

A New Kind of Statehood

The 1972 reorganisation was followed in 1975 by the grant of universal adult franchise in Arunachal Pradesh; in 1984 by a district council being set up for the tribal areas of Tripura under the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution; and in 1987 by the grant of statehood to Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Whereas all these steps can be seen as a fulfilment of India's democratic commitment, they also contributed to the weakening of secessionist violence which is now confined to the Naga-inhabited northern and eastern hills of Manipur.

These two reorganisations have, in effect, modified the original assumptions of the Indian Constitution about federalism in India. In the first place, the new states are small in terms of population if not in size of territory. Secondly, they are financially not viable and depend almost entirely on central assistance. Thirdly, in each of them the Governor has special powers. The hill states seem keener on being regarded as equal to others in constitutional status than on state autonomy as such. On the whole, they have maintained good relations with the Centre. But there has been an apprehension about the increasing influence of the Congress party through the indirect mediation of the Union government.

New Party Alignment

The Congress party reaped rich dividends out of the reorganisation. In 1972 Assembly elections were held in Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram. The Congress came to power in Assam and Tripura. Meghalaya went to the APHLC, Mizoram to the Mizo Union, while Manipur

was thrown into chronic ministerial instability. The Naga Nationalist Organisation, an ally of the Congress in Nagaland, was defeated. That year the Congress established its unit in Arunachal Pradesh.

In 1974 the Congress launched what may be called an 'operation absorption'. In 1974 the Mizo Union and in 1975 the Naga Nationalist Organisation joined the Congress. The APHLC was split in 1976, the bulk of its Garo component and a section of its Khasi component following Williamson A. Sangma into the Congress. The Khasi political scene was splintered almost as in Manipur, throwing Meghalaya too into the vortex of ministerial instability.

Meanwhile, on 11 November 1975 the Shillong Accord was signed with the Naga underground with expected confusion. There were three provisions to the accord: (i) the underground agreed to abide by the Constitution of India; (ii) it agreed to surrender arms while the government agreed to rehabilitate the youth returning to abide by the law; and (iii) the two sides agreed that 'the remaining issues' would be settled through further negotiations. Just as in the Hydari agreement of 1947, a section of the Naga underground was unhappy with the accord. They invoked the name of A. Z. Phizo to strengthen their opposition. A convenient patchwork for underground unity was found in the phrase 'remaining issues' which was interpreted by them to mean a political settlement, while the government held on to the position that the remaining issues were administrative, particularly relating to the mode of rehabilitation. In 1975–76, however, Phizo's name had lost its magic touch and Indira Gandhi's internal Emergency only created fear. After the death of Phizo 'the remaining issues' seem to have passed into history.

The impact of the 1975 Emergency was, on the whole, mild in northeast India. In the 1977 Lok Sabha elections, however, the Congress lost four seats in Assam, one in Meghalaya (Shillong), one in Tripura (general) and the single seat in Nagaland.

It is doubtful whether the Congress became established in the hills of northeast India mainly as a national party or as a party in power at the Centre. In 1977 Bakin Pertin, having won one of the two Lok Sabha seats in Arunachal Pradesh as an independent, formed a regional party – the People's Party of Arunachal. In the Lok Sabha he sat on the Janata Party benches. After the

defeat of Indira Gandhi's Congress in the 1977 elections, on the other hand, the entire Congress party in Arunachal Pradesh joined the Janata Party, creating some problem for the latter's relations with the People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh. When the Janata Party government collapsed, many of the defectors returned to the People's Party as the Congress had ceased to exist for the time being. Indira Gandhi's return to power at the Centre was accompanied by the revival of the Congress in Arunachal Pradesh under a new leadership.

In March 1977 the Congress government in Tripura made room for a coalition of the Congress for Democracy (later the Janata Party) and the CPI(M). The Janata Party in Tripura was soon beleaguered by factionalism and the CPI(M) withdrew its support to the government. In the elections of December 1977 and January 1983 the CPI(M) came to power. In 1984 it secured the autonomous district council for the Tripura Tribal Areas through the 49th Amendment to the Indian Constitution.

In the state Assembly elections in 1978, the Congress lost in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram. In Meghalaya the predominantly Khasi All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference, and almost exclusively Khasi Hills State People's Democratic Party and People's Demand Implementation Committee united to form a government. In 1979 B.B.Lyngdoh again split the APHLC to form a coalition government with the Congress. In 1983 he returned to the APHLC. Indira Gandhi's return to power had reinstated the Congress in the hills. The trend continued through the Rajiv Gandhi period.

The Janata Dal–National Front did not even try their luck in the hills of northeast India. Their association with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) positively discouraged the hill people regarding the new experiment. It was, however, the Asom Gana Parishad which joined the National Front. But it soon split and lost power. It returned to power after the Assembly elections held simultaneously with the eleventh Lok Sabha elections (1996).

Violence

In 1978, when a by-election was necessitated by the death of the Janata Party M.P. from Mangaldoi in the lower Brahmaputra

valley, a sudden increase in the voters' roll was detected. It was alleged that 65,000 outsiders/infiltrators/foreigners (35,000 Muslim, 30,000 Hindu) had been enrolled and a demand for the expulsion of all 'foreigners' was made. Violence erupted at Dibrugarh, the oil town, and by June 1979, spread throughout the Brahmaputra valley. Later it spread to the Khasi hills of Meghalaya. In 1978 the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti organised a depredation on the Bengali settlers in Tripura.

The 'anti-foreigners' agitation in the Brahmaputra valley communally divided the state cabinet and Assam came under President's rule. In 1980 the Lok Sabha elections could not be held to the twelve seats in the Brahmaputra valley and the Shillong seat in Meghalaya. There was no question of Assembly elections in Assam. In 1982 an 'Independent Government of Tripura' was proclaimed. This, however, split the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti. Violence reappeared in Mizoram. Lal Denga's demand for the dismissal of the People's Conference government in Mizoram was turned down by the Centre and peace talks with the Mizo National Front broke down.

In January 1983 the CPI(M)-led Left Front returned to power in Tripura. In February 1983 Assembly elections were held in Assam and were marked by widespread violence. The Brahmaputra valley recorded a polling of 15 per cent. The Congress returned to power. In January 1984 Yangmasho Shaiza, a former Chief Minister of Manipur, was assassinated. His rival from the same tribe of Tangkhul Naga, Rishang Keishing, was also attacked. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland, a militant outfit of the Naga National Council, organised a series of attempts on the lives of Manipur politicians. However, in Mizoram things improved with the resumption of talks with Lal Denga in October 1984.

Rajiv Gandhi's Initiative

A new political initiative was taken by Rajiv Gandhi, resulting in a memorandum of settlement on foreigners in Assam (the Assam Accord) on 15 August 1985. On 18 August the Assam Assembly was dissolved and regrouping of political forces started. On 14 October 1985 the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)

was formed at Golaghat by the agitation leaders. On November 10 the United Minority Front was formed at Hojai. In December the AGP won elections without an absolute majority and formed a government with the support of some independents. It joined the National Front.

In December 1985 Lok Sabha elections were held in the twelve Brahmaputra valley constituencies and in Shillong. The AGP, however, could not overcome factionalism. A section of the agitators opposed the Assam Accord under the banner of the United Liberation Front of Assam. The Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister fell out with each other and the AGP lost power while the ULFA resorted to unprecedented violence. This was positively disastrous for Assam as it set in motion a number of sub-regional movements, some quite violent. The Bodoland agitation was almost a replica of the Assam agitation and matched its ferocity (the Bodo Security Force *vis-a-vis* the ULFA). The major disadvantage for the Bodoland movement, however, was the sparse distribution of the Bodo population in the Brahmaputra valley. The agitation's strategy, therefore, was centred on the claim that the Bodos were the 'original' settlers.

In January 1986 the Left Front Government of Tripura granted amnesty to tribal guerillas. But on 4 June at least nine non-tribal persons were killed by the guerillas. In 1988 the Left Front lost power in Tripura, alleging Congress complicity in the violence. Things, however, improved in Mizoram with the signing of the Mizo Accord and the lifting of the ban on the Mizo National Front. Through the Assembly election of February 1987, Lal Denga became Chief Minister of Mizoram. On 20 February 1987 statehood was conferred on Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

Varieties of Autonomy

The power of the State, the spread of administration, the growth of communications and the persistence of factionalism have contributed to the weakening of secessionism. It should be noted that Phizo's independent government operated from the un-administered Naga Tribal Area and Lal Denga's MNF

violence was facilitated by open, unguarded international borders on both sides of the Mizo hills. Of course much violence still continues along the borders with Bangladesh, as does smuggling. But there is a qualitative difference from the situation obtaining in the 1950s and 1960s.

Factionalism is inextricably tied up with ethnic politics, giving it a centrifugal continuity. After the formation of Mizoram, Pawis(Lais) in the south and Hmars in the north have raised their demand for autonomy. In Manipur the Kuki–Naga conflict has intensified. In Meghalaya the Congress thrives on the Garo– Khasi rivalry. In Arunachal Pradesh, Gegong Apang, the Chief Minister, virtually defied the Central government and the party leadership on the question of Chakma and Hajong refugees, and won more than two-thirds of the Assembly seats in 1995. He is believed to have sabotaged the prospects of the two Lok Sabha candidates of the Congress. When the Congress took disciplinary action against him, Apang walked out of it with almost all the MLAs and formed a new government.

The hills–plains equation in Assam politics has never been stable, with the parties complaining of the Assam government's persistent intervention in their areas of autonomy and the latter's complaint of its abuse by the hill parties. At the same time, much of the murk in hill politics sprang from factional politics within the Assam Congress, with rival leaders patronising rival hill factions. Politics in the Karbi–Anglong District is its latest illustration.

During the 1980 elections a boycott was sponsored by the All-Assam Student's Union. In the autonomous district constituency of Karbi–Anglong and north Cachar two Kachari candidates filed nominations while no Karbi(Mikir) did. Polling could not be held in the constituency as the Assamese government officers refused to conduct it. The incident showed the political orientation of the Karbis towards the Assamese (while the Kacharis are traditionally oriented towards the Bengali speaking Barak valley). Within a decade, however, a statehood demand by the Karbis cropped up. In November 1992 the Karbi District Council was superseded by the Assam government. To its extreme embarassment, the Gauhati High Court reinstated the district council, passing strictures against the state government. In the elections to the Karbi and the North Cachar District

Councils held on 3 June 1996, the Congress was defeated by the Autonomous State Demand Committee.

It is evident that northeast Indian politics has contributed a staggering variety of autonomy to the Indian constitutional structure. Right at the beginning the part A tribal areas were granted autonomous districts. The Naga hills never had them. When the Naga Tribal Area was joined with the Naga Hills District, as the Tuensang District, to form the state of Nagaland, the 13th Amendment of the Indian Constitution provided for regional autonomy under Article 371A, for that area. When the autonomous state of Meghalaya was set up in 1969, the 22nd Amendment inserted Article 244A, which is still in force. The reorganisation of 1971 drastically altered the pattern of the Sixth Schedule. The Mizoram District Council disappeared and the Pawi–Lakher Regional Council was split into three district councils. The district councils in Meghalaya were devalued, while in Assam they were strengthened by the grant of developmental functions. In Manipur district councils were created by a parliamentary Act, outside the scope of the Sixth Schedule. Later, when the Sixth Schedule was introduced in Tripura, a Tripura Tribal Areas District was created as it had no territorial integrity. In 1993 the Bodoland Autonomous Council was created by a state legislation, and it had no territorial integrity.

On 1 April 1995, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Hiteswar Saikia, Chief Minister of Assam, and representatives of several political organisations of the Karbi–Anglong and North Cachar Districts (the Autonomous State Demand Committee and the Karbi Students' Association from the Karbi hills, and the North Cachar Hill State Forum and the Dimasa Students' Federation from north Cachar) envisaging a larger autonomy for district councils. The format of an 'autonomous council' would imply a higher political status than that of the (autonomous) district council but lower than that of the autonomous state as envisaged for Meghalaya in 1970. The change would call for an amendment of the Sixth Schedule. Almost simultaneously a scheme for autonomy, somewhat resembling the Bodo autonomy scheme, was worked out for the Lalungs who live near the district of Karbi–Anglong.

Consensus, Violence and Secession

Some social scientists like F.G. Bailey have made a distinction between 'politics' and 'war-like activities' – the former being assumedly based on bargain and consensus and the latter excluding them. Historically the distinction is tenuous even in the so-called 'developed countries'; for the hill areas of northeast India, one of the most vibrant regions of the world, it is irrelevant. War and peace alternate in its politics.

The strongest argument in favour of this thesis is Manipur which, at the moment, is one of the most violent states in northeast India. It is ethnically and politically a fragmented state. Between 1972 and 2010, a political party has won 30 out of 60 Assembly seats only twice – the Congress in 1984 and 2007. In 1990 its strength came down to 26 and in 1995 to 21. It split in 1997 and its strength came down to 11 in 2000. Yet, since March 1973, Manipur has mostly had Congress governments under alternating leaders or President's rule. Bedevilled by defections, Manipur, a Hindu–Meitei dominated state, has had a Muslim Meitei, a Christian Naga and a Christian Kuki as Chief Ministers at different points of time. Meghalaya, the model of constitutional politics during the hill state movement, plunged into intense ethnic violence. In Tripura radical communist politics coexists with frequently violent ethnic hatred. Arunachal Pradesh, which became a state even before asking for that status, has become turbulent on the question of the Chakma and Hajong refugees settled there in the 1960s, so much so that when former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited the state in 1996, he was greeted by a *bandh* (general strike).

Yet at the social level, the people in the northeast are consensus loving. In 1960 for instance, when Moinul Huq Chowdhury, a cabinet minister of Assam, voted against the Assam Official Language Bill, he claimed that he had obtained the permission of the Chief Minister, and was therefore not called upon to resign. Gegong Apang, the Congressite Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, adopted the demand for the removal of the Chakma refugees and won the 1995 Assembly elections for his new Arunachal Congress party with a two-thirds majority.

Because of its proximity to the international border, political

violence in northeast India occasionally takes the form of secessionism. However, apprehensions about northeastern secessionism have been greatly exaggerated. Lal Denga's participation in the constitutional government of Mizoram should dispel all apprehensions about the 'inevitable dismemberment' of northeast India. Even in 1996, the Congress won 5 of the 10 Lok Sabha seats in the hill states (Manipur 2 out of 2, Meghalaya 1 out of 2, Mizoram 1 out of 1, Nagaland 1 out of 1) while the CPI(M) won both the seats in Tripura. In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections the Congress won 10 out of 14 seats in Assam and both the seats in Meghalaya.

POSTSCRIPT 2

Northeast India in the Twenty-first Century

Identity, Rights and Development

Sociologically, northeast India is going through continuous fragmentation rather than internal integration. Born as a composite province out of imperial exigency and subjected to the vagaries of colonial geography, Assam had a two-fold problem since her birth: fighting imperialism and establishing the identity or, rather, identities of her people. Freedom movements, opposition to the Coupland plan and rejection of the grouping plan of the Cabinet Mission had forged a temporary unity between the inhabitants of the the plains and the hills of northeast India. But this unity developed cracks in the 1960s on the language issue.

The territorial realignment of the composite province of Assam that began at the time of Independence finally ended in 1972. That year a new chapter of identity politics unfolded with an agitation to add Assamese to the medium of instruction. The movement began in the universities of Assam and eventually threw up a new generation of student leaders who formed a new organisation, the United Liberation Front of Assam or ULFA in 1979. But it came into its own sometime after 1985 when its parent body, the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU), forced the Union government to sign the Assam Accord for the preservation of Assamese interest and culture. Soon after, the AASU became a political party, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP. The AGP won the elections in 1985 and governed the state for a few years. It was this radicalization of Assamese politics that encouraged the young Bodo leaders to replace the moderate old guard of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam, and secure a Bodo Accord in February 2003 with the state government, its Memorandum of Settlement being, unusually, incorporated in the Constitution

of India by the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2003, to set up a Bodoland Territorial Areas District (lacking integrity) and transfer 40 powers to it.[1] By the same Amendment Act about 30 additional powers were transferred to the Autonomous District Councils of Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar districts. The Bodo leaders lost out on the wider Bodo-Kachari unity. They also failed to preserve the plains–tribal unity that existed earlier. Success of the hills and (Bodo) plains leaders encouraged other ethnic aspirations in Assam. Outside the scope of the Sixth Schedule, the state government has set up non-territorial autonomous councils for the Mishings, Tiwas, Rabha-Hasong/Hazongs, Thengal Kacharis, Sonowals, and Deoris.[2]

Extremist politics in northeast India shows a specific trend. When the majority of the movement moves towards a compromise with the establishment, a minority generally dissents and vouches to carry on the struggle for achieving the unfulfilled objectives of the original movement. It was Naga politics that set the pattern. The Naga Settlement of 1976 had got the reluctant endorsement of even Phizo. But the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCM) denounced him and vowed to fight for a sovereign *Nagalim*. It soon split into two parts, the first, NSCN(I-M), led by Isak Swu, a Sema, as chairman, and Thuingaleng Muiva, a Tangkhul from Manipur, as secretary, and the other, NSCN(K), by Khaplang, a Burmese Naga. The AASU, AGP, ULFA and Bodo movements followed this pattern in the plains. At the moment organised violence is aimed at least as much against the other ethnic groups as against the state which shows the corrosion of the movements' strength. The ULFA tried to build a pan-NEI alliance of the sundry militant groups of the region but failed due to ideological differences. Its dream for a sovereign and greater Assam repulses the hill groups. It would not mind the infiltration of foreigners, i.e., the Bangladeshis, if that helps the cause of Assam's sovereignty. On this count it has sharp differences with its parent body, the Asom Gana Parishad which chooses to stay in India sans foreigners. The three Naga factions are, at the moment, not fighting with each other; but they cannot be said to be united. The union of all Nagas of India and Myanmar in a sovereign *Nagalim* is an all but abandoned slogan. It has virtually been narrowed down to that of a greater

Nagaland including the Naga-inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and, particularly, Manipur, with silent support from Nagaland's politicians across the political divide. Naturally, the other concerned states are with Manipur.

The long-term demographic impact of the reorganization was a fall in the proportion of non-tribal population in Meghalaya. As a result, the number of non-reserved seats in the state legislative assembly fell from ten to five, three in the Khasi hills (within Shillong, the state capital) and two in the Garo hills (Mahendragunj and Phulbari, foothills towns). In the 2008 Assembly election only three of these seats went to non-tribals (one seat in Shillong, two seats in the Garo hills). The last time the one non-tribal Assembly seat of Dimapur I in Nagaland went to a non-tribal, a Congressman, was in 1982. This phenomenon has given rise to the allegation of gerrymandering. However, national political parties have registered their arrival in the hill states. The Indian National Congress (INC), as already noted, arrived in a big way after 1972. After its 1996 electoral success at the centre, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had been present in Manipur and Tripura, made its presence felt in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. In 1998 it won three assembly seats in Meghalaya, two unreserved in the Khasi hills and one reserved for the Scheduled Tribes in the Garo hills. In 2003 it won seven Assembly seats in Nagaland, including Dimapur I, where its candidate was a former Congress stalwart and chief minister, Hokishe Sema. In 2004 it won both the Lok Sabha seats from Arunachal Pradesh but, in 2009, lost them to the INC. In the 2003 Assembly election in Nagaland it emerged as the third major party with seven seats and formed a coalition government with the Naga People's Front and others.[3] Though that government was short-lived, the alliance repeated the feat in 2008. In 2004 it won both the Lok Sabha seats from Arunachal Pradesh but lost them in 2009.

An interesting sideshow of the national politics being recently played out in the hills is presented by Purno A. Sangma, a Congress stalwart in the Garo hills. Sangma, after holding a cabinet post in the Union Government, became the speaker of the Lok Sabha. In 1998, when a possibility of Mrs Sonia Gandhi becoming the prime minister of India emerged, Sangma, along with the Maharashtrian politician, Sharad Pawar, resigned

from the party on the issue of her foreign origin and formed the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). He won the 1999 Lok Sabha election on an NCP ticket. In 2004, when Sharad Pawar's attitude to Sonia Gandhi, appeared to be softening, Sangma resigned from the NCP and joined the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC), another break-away group of the Indian National Congress. He won the Lok Sabha election on the AITC's ticket, but left the party and resigned from the Lok Sabha in 2005. In 2006 he won a by-election to the Lok Sabha on an NCP ticket again.

Political flexibility took a murkier turn in Arunachal Pradesh. In 1995, at the height of his factional conflict with P. K. Thungan, a Union minister, Gegong Apang, the Congress Chief Minister of the state, backed the demand of the Arunachal Pradesh Students Union for expulsion of the Chakma, Hajong and Tibetan refugees from Arunachal Pradesh. Though his party leaders were against the demand, he won the 1995 Assembly election with a two-thirds majority for the Indian National Congress in the state. When, during the election campaign, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao visited the Arunachal capital, he was greeted by a *bandh*. When Apang was expelled from the INC he took all 54 of his party members into a new party, the Arunachal Congress. Both the Lok Sabha seats went to that party in 1996 and 1998.[4] But factionalism began to work against him. He lost the chief minister's post after 19 years in January 1999. In 2003, his Arunachal Congress and a few others formed the United Democratic Front. They joined the BJP in 2004 and that year the BJP won both the Lok Sabha seats from the state. But it lost the general elections. So Apang returned to the INC and became chief minister of the state for another three years. In 2010 he was arrested for a 1000-crore scam in the public distribution system.

The weakening of macro-level political challenges has eased the national mainstream's anxiety about the security and the 'sensitivity' of the region, so much so that these hill states have been welcoming foreign as well as domestic tourists. Inner Line restrictions have been considerably relaxed for them.[5] Like the rest of India, it is settling for micro-level ethnic politics in the name of students and youth and the factionalism of their leaders. Two dangers linger: one, the educated but unemployed

youth of the underdeveloped landlocked region fighting their claustrophobia by indulging in drugs and smuggling, joining extortion rackets or underground militant groups and, two, the unimaginative state resorting to inhuman violence on men and women in the name of fighting insurgency. The few rail routes and highways remain vulnerable to attacks. Even in Arunachal Pradesh, which does not have a single jail and where violence first flared up only in the 1990s, the government had to pass a draconian Arunachal Pradesh Control of Organised Crime Act in 2002.[6]

Ironically, secessionist violence is now confined to Assam and Manipur, the two Hindu-majority states of northeast India. Like Assam in 1874, the United Mikir and North Cachar (UMNC) Hills District had been created as a composite district in 1950. It was split into two administrative districts in February 1970 and into two autonomous districts in October 1976. The Mikir Hills District was rechristened Karbi-Anglong at the time of the split on 14 October 1976. On 4 April 2010 the North Cachar Hills district was renamed the Dima Hasao District. Though the great Kachari family is about 250 times the strength of the Mikir ethnic group in the whole of northeast India, the Dimasa Kacharis inhabiting that district are a miniscule section of the group, known in the Brahmaputra Valley as Bodo. In UMNC district they were a distant second group, after the Karbis. After bifurcation of that district, the two ethnic groups got numerical dominance in the respective parts. But the parts hardly became homogeneous. Karbi villages in the North Cachar district and Kachari villages in Karbi Anglong remained trouble spots, besides groups of Nagas, Kukis, Khasis, Tiwas and other tribes, as well as plains people.

A People's Democratic Front was formed in 1985 to work for an autonomous state – of which Meghalaya 1970 was the precedent – for the Mikir (Karbi) and North Cachar district within Assam by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation. Though it was set up at Halflong, head quarters of North Cachar, ethnically its leaders like Elwin Teron and Jayanta Rongpi, were predominantly Karbi (as it had to be with a population ratio of 4:1). This organization was rechristened the Autonomous State Demand Committee or ASDC on 6 May 1986. It won the Lok Sabha elections from the

autonomous district constituency against the Congress in 1991 and 1996. It recorded success in the state Legislative Assembly and the two District Council elections. In 1998, however, the organization was virtually split due to differences within the local leadership, but Rongpi won in 1998 as representative of his original party, the CPI (ML) Liberation. The Stalinist policy of punching class with nationality was over and so was the Karbi-Dimasa unity. The Lok Sabha seat went back to the Congress. From then on the Karbi-Dimasa politics moved along different, and ethnic, trajectories.

The ASDC formally split in July 2000. Later, a faction called ASDC-United (ASDC-U) endorsed Kuki National Assembly's demand for a Kuki autonomous council, ostensibly to widen its support base against the rival faction of ASDC-Progressive (ASDC-P), an ally of the CPI (ML) Liberation. This led to violence between the Karbis and the Kukis in the district.[7] That year the Lok Sabha seat went back to the Congress party. This, more violent part of the Karbi movement had been constituted in 1994 by a Karbi People's Front and a Karbi National Volunteer Force which united to form the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) in 1999. But, after its leadership signed a cease-fire agreement with the government in 2002, the UPDS was split between a pro-talk and an anti-talk faction. On May 16, 2004, the UPDS (Anti-Talks) rechristened itself as the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF) and its armed wing, as the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Resistance Force (KLNPR). At the end of December 2010 it came to an accord with the state and the Union government for replacing the Karbi-Anglong Autonomous District by a Karbi-Anglong Autonomous Territory, under the Sixth Schedule, with three revenue districts and wider powers.[8]

In 1993 a Dima National Security Force (DNSF) had been set up. In 1995 the chairman of the DNSF dissolved his organization and surrendered to the government. But Mihir Barman, a young dissident, assumed the name of Jewel Gorlosa and set up a more militant organization, the Dima Halam Daoga (Jewel), also called the Black Widow. It forged an alliance with the NSCN (I-M) but broke off when it realised that the latter wanted to control the former. There were, also, two fundamental contradictions in the alliance, the Naga claim to Dimapur,

capital of the Dimasa Kachari kingdom of yore and the anti-Zemi thrust of the Dima movement. The NSCN (I-M) demanded money for the training it gave the Dima. In fact it abducted three members of the Dima Halam Daoga (DHD) with the help of another of its clients, rebel groups called the Hmar People's Convention (Democratic) that in turn provoked a Dimasa-Hmar armed conflict on 31 March 2003.[9] In September–October 2005 the Karbi-Anglong district saw a vicious Karbi-Dimasa conflict. There were clashes between the Karbis and the Kukis, the biggest minority group in Karbi-Anglong.[10] The Zemi Nagas, politically active since the Jadonang-Guidalo movement of the 1930s, took the leadership in forming a North Cachar Hills Indigenous Students' Forum demanding the bifurcation of the North Cachar Hills autonomous district – one for the Dimasas and one for the non-Dimasas. Violence in the North Cachar district was at its peak in 2009. But in early June that year Barman was arrested in Bangalore and was flown to Assam.

The peak of violence in northeast India as a whole, was reached on 30 October 2008 with as many as 13 bomb blasts in the plains towns of Guwahati, Bongaingaon, Barpeta and Kokrajhar by the ULFA with logistic support from the Bangladesh-based Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) that killed over 70 people.[11] On the same day, Black Widow militants ambushed a police party escorting the dead body of a pro-talk activist of the Dima Halam Daoga[12] in North Cachar. After the change of regime in Bangladesh in December 2008 and improvement of relations between India and Myanmar, the government was able to substantially control ULFA. It got a boost with the arrest of the ULFA chairman, Arabinda Rajkhowa, in Bangladesh. He was detained by the Government of Assam and released on bail in December 2010 to facilitate negotiation, though the ULFA commander-in-chief, Paresh Barua, avoided arrest and disagreed on dialogue for anything less than sovereignty of Assam.

A peculiar phenomenon of northeast Indian politics is the inverse relation of secessionism and internal conflict. Separatist violence has occasionally been resorted to by the Meitei youth in Manipur. For the Nagas of Manipur, on the other hand, the issue is less about sovereignty than a greater *Nagalim*. They are certainly not united on that. In four decades since 1972, only one party has won 30 out of her 60 Assembly seats in the

elections: the Indian National Congress, in 1984 and 2007. In 1990 its strength came down to 26 and, after a split due to factionalism in 1997 to 11in 2000. Yet, for the major part of the period (when it was not under the President's rule), it was ruled by the Indian National Congress. On the other hand, this Hindu Meitei dominated state had a Muslim Meitei, two Christian Tangkhul Nagas and a Christian Kuki as chief ministers at different points of time. It can be argued that this subtle accommodation has preserved the unity of the state against the continuous challenge of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland by NSCN (I-M).[13] In June 2001, when the National Democratic Alliance-led Union government offered ceasefire to the NSCN(I-M) that extended beyond the borders of Nagaland, there was such a violent reaction in Manipur, (which took it to be a step toward granting Manipur's territory to *Nagalim)*, that Manipur had to be brought under the President's rule and the offer to the NSCN (I-M) withdrawn,

Within Nagaland and Mizoram, which offered a direct challenge to the Union government, the magnitude of ethnic violence is now low but not altogether absent. In the 1990s, conflict between the Reangs and the Mizos was intense in Mizoram. While constitutional politics and ethnic violence go hand in hand in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh is slowly moving toward this pattern. In the 1980s and 1990s, Meghalaya and Tripura saw intense ethnic violence while Arunachal Pradesh had it in the 1990s (over the question of settlement of Chakma refugees).

For two decades, elections to the five Manipur district councils could not be held because of the insurgents demanding transfer of the northern Manipur hills to a 'sovereign' *Nagalim*. Since August 1997, when the NSCN (I-M) agreed to a cease fire, intermittent talks with representatives of the Union government are being held. In 2010 Muiva, while visiting India for talks with the government representatives on the Naga issue,[14] expressed his desire to visit his native village in Manipur. While the Government of India would not object to his visit, and while the NPF-NDA government of Nagaland supported it, the Congress Chief Minister of Manipur announced that Muiva would be arrested in Manipur as several criminal cases were pending against him there. The Naga militants of

Manipur at once combined their movement against the district council elections with the protest against the bar to Muiva's visit to Manipur. The firmness of the government of Manipur made the Union government advise Muiva to indefinitely postpone his visit. Muiva went back and election was held to the district councils.

But Manipur has a special and unique angle—the women. This is the state where women have been at the forefront of democratic protest movements since the colonial days. On 1 November 2000, following a reported bomb attack by insurgents in which no one was injured and no culprit identified, an Assam Rifles contingent opened indiscriminate fire on a peaceful crowd waiting at a bus stop in a village near the Imphal airport. They suspected that they were insurgents. The shooting killed 10 people including a pregnant woman, and in addition 34 people were beaten up. Three days later, an ordinary village woman, Irom Chanu Sharmila, started an indefinite fast demanding the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, from Manipur that continues eleven years down.[15] Meanwhile, on 4 July 2004 Thangjam Manorama, another village woman was allegedly raped and killed by Assam Rifles men. The valley was outraged. On 15 July, 12 Manipuri women put up an unprecedented naked demonstration in Imphal against the rape and murder. The national media came forward to demand punishment of the offenders. The state government set up a commission of enquiry. The security men challenged the authority of the state government to set up a commission of enquiry against the central forces. On 15 September 2010 the main bench of the Gauhati High Court upheld the power of the state government to set up the enquiry commission paving the way for penal action by the Ministry of Home Affairs against the guilty.

As the overall political situation has cooled down, there is a long-awaited attention being paid to the economic needs of the region. By the turn of the century, attention was drawn toward developing trade and economic relation with the southeast Asian countries, particularly Myanmar (Burma). It was difficult to overcome the reservation about the Myanmar government's record on democracy. It had to be set aside after continuously losing the competition with China in getting access to Myanmar's

gas reserves. In 2004 a 'Look East policy was officially adopted by undertaking revival of land routes with southeast Asia through northeast India. It was expected to provide northeast India some badly needed breathing space.[16] This, however, will need a cool and cautious assessment of the dictates of the political geography of northeast India.

A controversial aspect of the developmental strategy relates to environment. In the 1960s a proposal to extend the railway line in the hills (to Burnihat in the Khasi hills) was resisted by a section of politicians in the name of preserving tribal interests and culture. The result is that all the hills other than the Khasi have a railway line today. On the other hand, the hill states are rapidly losing their forest cover as there is very little of forest reservation. Since the 1990s a project for mining of uranium in the southwestern Khasi hills has been resisted on the grounds of environment. In October 2010 the Union Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh received a memorandum from the Adi Students' Association in Arunachal Pradesh opposing construction of big dams in the state.[17] His pursuance of the issue created a major controversy with a Congress MP from the state attacking him. Recently a huge controversy developed about the report of China building dams on the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra river system diverting much of the water to benefit arid regions in country.[18]

Political Geography of Northeast India

No other part of India was as much affected by the partitions of 1937 (with Myanmar) and 1947 (with Pakistan) as northeast India. The first partition created a wall, though it did not not sever all communications, to the east, particularly affecting the Nagas and the Mizos who lived on both sides of the border. The second partition turned the whole of northeast India virtually into an island with only a 20-kilometre wide land connection with the rest of India (the Siliguri bottle-neck). The tribal communities of today's Meghalaya, (Garo, Hajong and Khasi), Tripura (Tripuri and Reang) and Mizoram (Mizo, Hmar, Kuki, Chakma), besides smaller tribal groups, were divided into two or three between the sovereign states of India, Myanmar and Pakistan. After the 1965 India-Pakistan war, trans-border

trade with its west was disrupted ruining cash crops like oranges. Particularly tragic was the fate of the Chittagong Hills Tract which, by virtue of its administrative association with the Chittagong district alone, went to Pakistan and was subjected to demographic assault.

Like most of the hill districts of Assam, the Chittagong Hill Tract of Bengal, under the Government of India Act, 1935, was an excluded area and had no voting right. It did not choose to be in Pakistan as Sylhet did in the 1947 referendum, Neither the Pakistan government nor its successor, the Bangladesh government, respected the communal rights of the local people in land or granted them much administrative autonomy in the line of the northeast Indian hills. On the other hand, both the governments encouraged non-tribal (Muslim) settlement in the area causing migration of Buddhist Chakma and other groups toward the Mizo hills of Assam and Tripura. At the time of Independence the non-tribal population of the Chittagong Hills Tract constituted 9 per cent of its total population. By 1991 it became the majority thanks to the policy of settlement of non-tribal population in the hills since the Kaptai hydro-electric project began in 1951 and several amendments introduced to the 1900 Regulation on the Administration of the Chittagong Hills Tract. Quantitatively, the Chittagong Hill Tract is still a better place for the tribals than Tripura where the tribals have been reduced to virtually a quarter of the total population. Qualitatively, however, the situation is worse because (1) non-tribal settlement in Tripura had started long before Independence, under the patronage of the tribal king, but was (2) accentuated after Independence and Partition by the influx of refugees.

Hence, the birth of the *Parbattya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti* with a militant wing that had a paradoxical name—*Shanti Bahini* (peace corps).This *Shanti Bahini* played a major part in the 1971 struggle for Bangladesh but was kept at a distance by the government after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman in 1975. With alleged support of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of the Government of India they became very active and, in turn, were persecuted.[19] In 1976 the Bangladesh army was deployed in the Tract but a full-scale operation took place in 1986 and was repeated intermittently

after that. To a large extent, the Chittagong Hill Tract's situation is responsible for Bangladesh playing host to insurgent groups of northeast India. The Government of India settled a large number of Chakmas from Chittagong Hill Tract and Hajongs from Mymensing of East Pakistan/Bangladesh in the thinly populated Arunachal Pradesh. The economic success of these sedentary cultivators soon produced jealousy contributing to ethnic tension.

Security of northeast India has been affected since the birth of the republic, in different degrees depending upon the timeframe, by hostility of her neighbours. The hostility of Pakistan has been almost congenital. It was revealed for the first time in 1956 when Pakistan arranged for the transportation of Phizo to the UK through her territory and, later, equipped his followers with arms. The Chinese hand was revealed in the 1960s with the provision of arms and training to Naga insurgents. There was a set-back to Pakistan with the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. But that was largely overcome by the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. For a long time Bangladesh was tossed between the army and the elected government of Begum Khaleda Zia with Shaikh Haseena, Mujib's daughter, coming in and out for short durations. All through, the pro-Pakistan, obscurantist, religious leadership of the country fanned anti-India communal sentiments, allowing the transportation of arms through the Chittagong Hills Tract and offering shelter to Indian militants running away from law. Another major headache for India is the Pakistan army's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)'s wing's surreptitious promotion of anti-India militancy through Bangladesh and even Nepal.

Tripura and Mizoram are the worst victims of political geography. Tripura is almost an Indian enclave in Bangladesh and Mizoram is sandwiched between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Her geographic location and terrain made Mizoram a victim of drug and weapon running for rebels in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Like Manipur, Mizoram has given shelter to thousands of refugees from Myanmar – not only the Chin but also persecuted pro-democracy Bamar activists. There is no doubt that opening of the east will benefit the northeastern states However, the government should be on guard against illegal traffic of drugs, arms and their carriers.

Ironically, the 1937 partition was to adversely affect the demographic profile of Burma too. The northern part of Arrakan contained a large number of Rohingiya Muslims, culturally affiliated to the Bengalis of Chittagong. It went to Buddhist-majority Burma. In the course of civil strife over the next six decades, a large section of these people had to leave their home along with another large section of Christian Chins who took shelter in India, mostly in Mizoram and Tripura. For nearly 50 years of its post-colonial history, Burma (Myanmar) has been under army rule. Except the Chinese and the North Koreans, almost all countries of the world disapprove of the military rule but are shy to oppose it. The Burmese rulers' main strength lies in Myanmar's huge natural resources, particularly petroleum and natural gas. But they are mortally afraid of Aung San Suu Kyi, a frail woman leading the National League for Democracy, though she was under detention for nearly 15 of a total of 21 years. More than half the territory of Myanmar is made up of hills and inhabited by minority ethnic groups. The majority ethnic group, the Bamar, makes about 60 per cent of the country's population and lives in the Irawaddy valley at its centre. At the time of Independence in 1947 the Shan, the Kachin and the Karen regions secured from the Union government the right of secession after ten years of association. One of the reasons that made the country's first elected Prime Minister, U Nu, hand over government to General Ne Win in October 1958 was the restlessness of these, mostly non-Buddhist, minorities at the end of the ten years' association with Myanmar. The arguments of the army sticking to power there is its claim to be able to preserve the country's unity. However, the army had to also regroup the country into seven valley divisions and seven frontier 'states' containing restless ethnic groups. They have problems managing the border in the west with the Rohingiya Muslims in the Rakhine state, which has a historic association with Bengal and the Christian Chins and Nagas whose kin live in India.[20]

Notes and References

1 Paragraph 20 to the Sixth Schedule that lists the autonomous districts (tribal areas), however, does not include the name of this district.

2 In an article entitled 'A New Assam' in *Eye*, the *Sunday Express* magazine, 30 January–5 February, 2011, Tarun Gogoi, chief minister of Assam, took satisfaction from the fact that 'Assam is the only state in the country to have an autonomous council for every community.' He meant the tribal communities.

3. 'Jamir Throws down the Gauntlet,' *The Statesman*, 28 December 2002.

4 S.K. Chaube, 'The Lok Sabha Elections in North-Easat India: 1996 and 1998,' in *Indian Democracy at the Turn of the Century*, ed. S.K. Chaube and Susheela Kaushik, (New Delhi, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, 1999), at p. 127.

5 Samudra Gupta Kashyap, 'Arunachal Visit Made Easier.' *The Indian Express* 5 October 2010. Also see David Buhril, 'Tribes in Turmoil' letter to the editor, *The Times of India*, 15 April 2003.

6 Some of these 'criminals' are of course truants from Assam and other hill states who are in hiding. But some are believed to be home-grown.

7 Praveen Kumar, 'Karbi-Kuki Clashes,' *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 28, No. 2, April 2004. Also Chandan Kr Sharma, 'Space, Identity, and Homeland Politics in Northeast India,' *Social Science Probings*, Vol. 22, No. 1, June 2010

8 Sushanta Talukdar, 'UPDS, Centre, Assam Government Inching towards Peace Accord,' *The Hindu*, 19 December 2010.

9 Wasbir Hasan, 'Insurgent Politics,' *The Hindu* 19 April 2003.

10 Chandan Kr Sharma, 'Space, Identity, and Homeland Politics in Northeast India,' *Social Science Probings,* Vol. 22, No. 1, June 2010

11 See 'India Under Seige,' editorial in *The Times of India* 31 October 2008.

12 B.B. Goswam, 'Seven Cops Killed in Ambush by Militants,' *The Times of India.* 31 December 2008.

13 In an interview with this author on 12 March 1977, Yangmashao Shaiza, one of the Tangkhul leaders and a former chief minister of Manipur announced that 'the Tangkhuls will never join Nagaland.'

14 Muiva arrived in New Delhi from Amsterdam on 27 February 2010 and submitted a 32-point demand for autonomy and an

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Appendix

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Table 1: Basic Data on Northeast India, 2001

State	Area Square km	Districts	Development Blocs	Urban (%)	Towns	Inhabited Villages	Panchayats/ Village Councils
Arunachal Pradesh	83,743	13	83	20.41	17	3863	1,639
Assam	78,438	23	219	12.62	87	25140	2,223
Manipur	22,347	9	34	23.88	15	2199	165
Meghalaya	22,429	7	39	19.63	16	5782	-
Mizoram	21,081	8	22	49.50	22	707	881
Nagaland	16,527	8	52	17.74	23	1278	-
Tripura	10,492	4	48	17.02	23	858	513

Table 2: Population of Northeast India, 2001

State	Total Population	Growth % 1991–2001	Density	Sex Ratio	Scheduled Tribes (%)	Literacy %		
						Total	Male	Female
India	1,028,610,328	27.28	324	933	8.20	64.94	75.26	53.37
Arunachal Pradesh	1,097,968	27.00	13	893	64.22	54.34	63.83	43.53
Assam	26,655,528	18.92	340	925	12.41	63.25	71.28	54.61
Manipur	2,293,896	24.86	111	978	34.20	70.53	80.33	60.53
Meghalaya	2,318,822	30.65	103	972	85.94	62.56	56.43	59.61
Mizoram	888,573	28.82	42	935	94.46	88.80	90.72	86.75
Nagaland	1,990,036	64.53	120	900	89.15	66.59	71.16	61.46
Tripura	3,199,203	16.03	305	948	31.05	73.19	81.02	64.91

Table 3: Linguistic Distribution in Northeast India, 2001

India/State	*Assamese*	*Bengali*	*Bodo*	*Hindi*	*Nepali*
India	128	812	13	4,110	28
Arunachal Pradesh	499	940	63	786	919
Assam	4,944	2791	493	597	215
Manipur	7	130	N	118	220
Meghalaya	158	804	15	217	226
Mizoram	11	918	2	120	102
Nagaland	93	326	27	315	189
Tripura	4	6,735	N	168	11

N = Negligible.
The numbers are for 10,000 persons

Table 4: Religious Composition of Northeast India, 2001

State	*Hindu*	*Muslim*	*Christian*	*Buddhist*	*Others*
India	827.578,868 (80.5%)	138,188,868 (12.4%)	24,080,016 (2.3%)	7,055,207 (0.8%)	30,806,007 (3.1)
Arunachal Pradesh	379,935 (34.6%)	205,548 (1.9%)	205,648 (18.7)	75,959 (13.0%)	230.860 (27.8%)
Assam	17,296,455 (64.9%)	8,240,611 (30.9%)	986,589 (3.7&)	51,029 (0.2%)	80,844 (0.3%)
Manipur	996,894 (46.0%)	190,939 (8,8%)	737,578 (34.0%)	1,926 (0.1%)	239,441 (10.1%)
Meghalaya	307,822 (13.3%)	99,169 (4.3%)	1,628.986 (70.3%)	4,703 (0.2%)	278,142 (11.9%)
Mizoram	31,562 (3.6%)	10,099 (1.1%)	772,809 (87.0%)	70,494 (7.9%)	3,509 (0.4%)
Nagaland	153,162 (7.7%)	35,005 (1.8%)	1.790,349 (90.0%)	1,356 (0.1%)	20,154 (.4%)
Tripura	2,739,310 (85.6)	254,442 (8.0%)	102,489 (3.2%)	98,922 (3.1%)	4,040 (0.1%)

Table 5
Population Trends in Northeastern States

(Thousand Persons)

Census Year	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Tripura	All India
1901	–	3,290	384	341	82	102	173	2,38,398
1911	–	3,849	346	394	91	149	230	2,52,093
1921	–	4,637	381	422	98	159	304	2,51,321
1931	–	5,560	446	481	124	179	382	2,78,977
1941	–	6,695	512	556	153	190	513	3,18,661
1951	–	8,029	578	606	196	213	639	3,61,083
1961	337	10,837	780	769	266	369	1,142	4,39,271
1971	468	14,625	1,073	1,012	332	516	1,556	5,48,160
1981	632	19,897*	1,421	1,336	494	775	2,053	6,85,185**
1991	858	22,295	1,827	1,761	686	1,216	2,745	8,44,321***

* As per 1971 Census.

** Includes the projected figures of Assam where census was not held.

*** Provisional

Source: Census of India 1991–Series 1; Basic Statistics.

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